

**North Central State College
Strategic Planning Model Report
August 2006**

Letter from the Model Selection Committee

This report and attachments was assembled as a result of a commission by North Central State's Academic Quality Improvement Program Committee in the spring of 2006. The AQIP Committee is charged with maintaining accreditation through the North Central Association. This accreditation model requires colleges to continuously develop "action projects" aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of processes and systems. While national literature points to the benefits of effective strategic planning in higher education, the main driver at NC State were the overwhelming comments by its employees in the 2005 Campus Quality Survey (Gardner Shaw II) on the need for improved research and planning services. This was listed as the top need by every campus group surveyed (faculty, staff, administrative, department chair).

Consequently, a cross-discipline, ad-hoc committee has been meeting since March 2006 to select a model on which to base future strategic planning. This committee has conducted extensive research, both in professional literature and experiences of colleges throughout the nation. The model proposed in this report is adapted from one used by Carroll Community College in rural Maryland, which Carroll officials state is effective yet practical. Several suggestions were also drawn from *Strategic Planning in Higher Education*, by Robert A. Seiver. However, the committee has made several adaptations to better meet the needs of NC State.

It is critical to note that this planning process represents a complete paradigm shift in the manner in which business is conducted at NC State – and will not be an easy transition for all stakeholders. However, if implemented correctly, it will better identify, prioritize and address the greatest educational needs in our communities based on widespread stakeholder input. As the annual budget will be tied to the plan, it will better ensure that limited resources are meeting those most urgent needs. It will also serve as an invaluable tool to communicate NC State priorities – another area of need identified in the Campus Quality Survey.

For this model to be successful, it should remain the primary vehicle for implementing high-level strategic initiatives. While the Team realizes that situations and crises occur throughout the year, diverging from this model risks destroying its integrity. Any major consideration to divert from this model must be justified and addressed through the planning council proposed in this report.

Respectfully submitted,

North Central State Strategic Plan Model Selection Team

Don Plotts, Chair	Lew Milner	Carmen Morrision	Adina Mentzer
Kate Peresie	Brooke Henwood	Brad McCormack	Tom Prendergast

Note: This report and its appendices are available at www.ncstatecollege.edu/aqip/

Summary

The Strategic Planning Model Selection Team (Team) proposes a strategic planning process designed to meet the needs of NC State's various stakeholders, notably the governing board, administrators, division and departmental planners, faculty and staff. To mesh with operational and budget planning cycles, strategic planning will employ a rolling two-year time frame. Although the planning horizon and discussion context for given topics often extend further than two years, the model delineates, in each case, specific tasks for completion within the subsequent two fiscal years. See [Appendix A](#) for proposed timeline/flowchart.

For purposes of clarity, the following definitions shall apply in this paper:

- **Strategic initiative.** High level initiatives that flow from the College vision and mission as established by the Board of Trustees and supported by multiple College divisions. For example, Achieving the Dream is a strategic initiative aiming to improve student success in developmental and gatekeeper courses, and consequently student persistence.
- **Goal.** A measurable objective in support of a strategic initiative. An example from Achieving the Dream would be that success rates in developmental math courses (C- or better) will increase by 4% each year for FY07, FY08, FY09.
- **Task.** A specific action in support of a goal. An example from Achieving the Dream would be to convert developmental math courses from a strictly lecture format to a lecture/lab combination.

For example, the President would announce five or fewer strategic initiatives in December 2006 (possibly more in subsequent years) to help drive development of the budget to be implemented by July 1, 2007. Each of these initiatives will be supported by multiple tasks that Division Chiefs (Vice Presidents/President's Staff) will develop in collaboration with the proposed Planning Advisory Council (PAC). It is possible that simple tasks, such as minor policy changes not requiring funding, could actually be implemented and completed by June 2007. Regardless, all initiatives will have completion expected by June 2008, though upon review by the PAC these initiatives could be extended.

Planning Standards

Planning at NC State will adhere to the following standards:

1. Planning is guided by the institutional mission, vision and values.
2. Planning is informed by data.
3. All employees have the opportunity to participate in planning.
4. Budgeting reflects college priorities as identified in the strategic plan.
5. Division and department plans support the strategic plan.
6. Institutional effectiveness is assessed.
7. Assessment results are used for improvement.
8. The plan is clearly communicated and successes are celebrated.
9. At least one initiative is directly related to student success.
10. Planning supports the institutional accreditation process.

The planning process is evaluated in the fall against the above standards. Evaluation is done by the Planning Advisory Council and is processed by the Institutional Research Department. Results are included in an Annual Report of the Planning Advisory Council released every November.

Planning Advisory Council and Planning Champion/Chair

Every college reviewed maintained an advisory council of administrators, faculty and staff to guide and facilitate the planning process. Hereafter, this council will be referred to as the Planning Advisory Council, or PAC. Establishment of PAC will result in the dissolution of the current Budget Committee. Likewise, the Quality Improvement Review Board (QIRB), established by the President in spring of 2006 to screen improvement proposals, will become part of the larger PAC. The Strategic Plan Model Selection Team commends the initial foundations laid by QIRB, and urges the PAC to adopt/adapt screening criteria QIRB has already developed into its processes.

From December through June, the PAC serves as the central planning and budgeting committee. It annually endorses Presidential strategic initiatives for priority funding. It ensures the funding is justified in terms of the initiatives in the strategic plan or anticipated improvements in PAC-approved institutional effectiveness indicators.

From September through November, the PAC gathers and analyzes data to help drive the next planning/budgeting cycle, culminating in the release of a PAC “Annual Report” in late November/early December to help guide the next planning cycle. It serves as the custodian of the strategic plan, approving additions and deletions of task statements from the plan, monitoring implementation of actions to fulfill the plan, and reporting to the college community on the college’s progress in achieving its strategic initiatives. It will also maintain a supplemental system of institutional effectiveness assessment measures for monitoring college performance and reporting to stakeholders. It solicits reviews and disseminates analytical data describing the college and its environment, and employs an annual environmental analysis to identify the strategic assets and vulnerabilities of the college.

PAC make-up. The PAC will include representatives from at least the following areas: academic affairs; student recruiting and financial aid; student development/retention; institutional advancement and alumni relations; facilities planning; finance and budgeting; information technology; marketing, communications and image; human resources. All PACs reviewed had representation from administration, faculty and staff. The Team also agreed that each Division Chief should dually serve on PAC and chair “councils” encompassing the College’s operational divisions (see Relationship to other Committees). It also agreed that a member of the Assessment Committee should serve on PAC. Given the intensive nature of PAC service, potential members must consider their existing job/committee responsibilities.

- PAC “reporters”. PAC will annually appoint from its membership a “reporter” for each unique Presidential strategic initiative. This reporter will collaborate with the Division Chiefs for tasks relating to their assigned initiative during the planning/budgeting cycle. This reporter will also follow-up with the Division Chiefs during the fall on the status of tasks implemented to support their assigned strategic initiatives, and report those results annually back to PAC.

PAC size. A survey of several community colleges revealed councils ranging in size from 12 to 27. Councils at most organizations, including small colleges, averaged in the high teens-low twenties. Likewise, NC State's current Budget Committee has 17 members.

- Update: As of August 2006, there were eight employees already slated to become members of PAC. These included the four Division Chiefs, as well as the four members of QIRB (three staff and one faculty). The Team suggests that additional appointments "round out" the suggested background criteria both in terms of position and area of employment.

PAC Chair. The PAC chair, or Planning Champion, shall have: the respect of the campus community; a vision for the campus largely in sync with the President, an intuitive understanding of strategic planning; access to power and clout; and enthusiasm. The Team believes that to the extent possible, the Chair should remain neutral concerning the agendas/plans of each Division. Finally, ample time must be allotted this individual to effectively champion the planning process. The Team recommends that this individual be appointed immediately, and help guide the President in appointing the remaining members of PAC.

Relationship to other NC State Committees and Departments. The PAC must be a powerful committee able to wade through campus politics.. It must also buffer and negotiate conflict among other areas and committees. The PAC will directly advise the President. Consequently, four "councils" encompassing NC State's operational divisions will report to the PAC, with each Division Chair as chair of each council ([Appendix B](#)). The Division Chiefs, who also serve as members of PAC, will have flexibility to organize their councils as they see best. Some colleges have organized all their existing committees under the PAC umbrella, while others appoint short-term, ad-hoc committees to further develop and implement strategy.

Planning/Budget Cycle PAC Activities (December – May)

In order for the strategic planning process to be effective, the plan must be dynamic, well communicated and constantly factored into the daily activities of the college. However, as can be seen in many institutions, a seemingly impossible gap often exists between what the College's Strategic Plan recommends and what the budget can support. Additionally, it is imperative that the College does not go through the process backwards, by creating a budget first and then base the planning on that budget. With this approach, neither the budget nor the strategic plan is guided by the proper drivers.

While strategic initiatives with defined goals are vital in the planning process, adequate and proper resources must be allocated to these goals. The allocation of these resources is a function of the annual budgeting process and must be closely aligned with the planning process. However, as a state entity, this vital link is complicated by the method and timing of the state subsidy figures required to complete a realistic budget for the coming fiscal year. Therefore, the budget process needs to occur as close to the release of upcoming subsidy information as possible. North Central State College's fiscal year runs from July 1st through June 30th.

North Central State College proposes a process which ties its annual budgeting process to the institution's strategic plan. The budget is developed during the winter and spring quarters preceding the start of the new fiscal year beginning in July. The process includes the following:

- The President announces strategic initiatives for the coming year (early December) that form the building blocks of the strategic plan. These represent a manageable number of high-level objectives (five or fewer the first year) flowing from the College mission and vision statements. They are formed from situational analysis data such as an annual strength, weakness, opportunity and threat (SWOT) analysis survey and select institutional effectiveness indicators gathered annually by the Institutional Research Office. The PAC will select the first set of institutional effectiveness indicators in fall 2006, to be annually benchmarked against successive years. Strategic initiatives guide division planning and budget for the upcoming fiscal year. In future years, the annual announcement of the President's strategic initiatives may include revision of the current initiatives in addition to new ones.¹
- The President should include planning assumptions forming the conclusion of the situational analysis conducted over the fall. The Institutional Research Office will direct the first set of planning assumptions during fall 2006 based on external and internal research (**See [Appendix C](#) for sample**). Assumptions might include anticipated budget increases, population trends, or insights into the job market. In a large sense, the planning assumptions help establish reasonable boundaries for the remainder of the planning and budgeting process²
- Following announcement of the strategic initiatives, Division Chiefs and staff develop measurable area goals and task statements in direct support of outlined strategic initiatives (December – January). Divisions may have to collaborate on setting goals (i.e., pass rates) that incorporate more than one division. Template forms such as those developed by QIRB can guide this process and ensure clarity and uniformity. Division goals and task statements in support of the President's strategic initiatives are furnished to the President by early February of each year. Obviously a Division goal will be more narrowly defined than those initially presented by the President.³
- Division Chiefs share area goals and related task statements at the PAC mid-February meeting for preliminary approval to the plan. Each Division Chief may also consider appointing a divisional liaison for each strategic initiative as an

¹ More initiatives could be added annually as the process is institutionalized, but should never exceed 10.

²See report conclusion (Next Steps) for list of potential information resources for planning assumptions.

³The Planning Model Team assumes there will be ongoing, annually reported Institutional Effectiveness Indicators applicable to many, but not all goals and tasks. For example, the certainly technology goals/tasks might be traced back to an ongoing effectiveness indicator on ratio of students to personal computer or online course enrollment that appears in EVERY annual Institutional Effectiveness Report. In unique cases where there is not a logical "fit" with a pre-selected effectiveness indicator and a task statement, an ad-hoc indicator may be selected and followed up on separately in the PAC Annual Report. For example, a goal and task statements to improve the turnaround time for IT support is too narrow to be reported annually in the Institutional Effectiveness report, but measurable results could be noted by the PAC Strategic reporter in his/her follow-up summary to the Presidential initiative to which that is linked.

alternate resource for interfacing with PAC reporters. Likewise, PAC appoints a strategic plan reporter for each strategic initiative

- Note the strategic plan is a working document that is altered several times each year. In March and April, the reporter for each strategic initiative reviews the task statements supporting the initiative to ensure that, collectively, the tasks effectively achieve the initiative. If the coordinator and/or reporter feel that additional tasks or coordination is necessary, the reporter brings such recommendations to the PAC in April in coordination with budget discussions.
- During mid-February PAC meeting, Vice President of Finance presents upcoming fiscal year budget assumptions and process; enrollment update, update on major gifts.
- In the late-February PAC meeting, all requests for monies to fund strategies are presented to the PAC, where Division Chiefs or their liaisons make the case for the strategic initiatives/goals/task statements related to their Division. New money requests must be justified in alignment with the following: Strategic initiatives within the current strategic plan, or anticipated positive impact on one or more institutional effectiveness measures. Additional discussion on enrollment projections underlying budget; and proposed tuition and fee structure.
- The Planning Advisory Council establishes preliminary balanced budget proposal (early March). Since cumulative budget requests will exceed available revenue, there will be a need to prioritize initiatives for funding. A balloting tool will help objectively rank the importance of the various segments of each divisional proposal for funding (**See [Appendix D](#) for tool examples**).⁴ Additional updates provided on revenue projections.
- The President, Vice Presidents and Planning Advisory Council develop the proposed budget (March-April), working through several versions of a balanced budget.⁵
- The Proposed budget is presented and shared with entire College for comment (April). Also, begin pilot development of at least one functional area plan supporting strategic initiatives as well as general mission-related goals. For example, this could include academic/assessment plan, student affairs plan, continuing education/training plan, marketing communications plan, technology

⁴ Other weighting factors could include temporal need (have to be done now?), pay-off factors (high impact-easy to implement; high impact-hard to implement; low impact-easy to implement; low impact-hard to implement), etc. Various analytical tools are available through the Seiver book.

⁵ Seiver offers several options for funding strategic change within tight budgets. These include creating a financially realistic plan, funding the “highest-payoff” initiatives, identifying through situational analysis programs or activities for liquidation, calculating funds for investment, factoring in anticipated savings, using a revenue-sharing formula if a newly funded program generates dollars allowing that program to retain some after-cost funding, and creating a “new ventures fund” funded with budget cuts in underperforming areas or surplus profits.

plan, etc. As planning becomes institutionalized, these functional area plans should become routinely developed documents.⁶

- During early May PAC meeting, final discussion and vote to endorse budget. Proposed budget and supporting material is presented to the Board of Trustees for approval (May).
- Approved budget and strategic plan are implemented (July). Note the task statements supporting each strategic initiative include identification of the person(s) responsible for their completion and an expected completion date.

Off-Planning/Budget Cycle PAC Activities (June – December)

- June-August. While PAC does not meet, the Institutional Research Office begins preparations for fall by compiling Institutional Effectiveness Core Indicators Report based on academic/fiscal year just completed. In August, the President presents this report to the Board of Trustees. The IR office also begins developing assessment vehicles such as surveys and actually begins the process of external analysis.
- September meeting. Update on the budget implemented over the summer. The Institutional Research Office presents Core Indicators of Institutional Effectiveness report adding baseline data from past fiscal year. Preview of SWOT survey to be conducted over the web for key campus stakeholders.
- October meeting. By early October, Division Chiefs report progress to President on ongoing implementation of strategic plan by task statement. PAC reporters for each strategic initiative meet with respective Division Chiefs to verify progress and file brief accomplishment and recommendation reports. IR Office compiles SWOT findings. Pilot functional area plan (s) presented to PAC.
- At early November PAC meeting, each PAC reporter has reviewed the status of the task statements in his or her area and assigns to each of them one of the following status descriptions:
 1. Retire-completed. The goal or action has been accomplished in full. For example, task statements meeting the expected completion of July 2007 would fall here.
 2. Retire-assimilated. The goal or action has been incorporated into routine operations and funding.

⁶ Ideally, all campus planning will flow from the strategic plan. Many of the PAC planning processes could and should be pushed down to a departmental/functional area level, especially if they support the task statements in the strategic plan – What are the critical steps involved in achieving a task?. See [Appendix E](#) for example of potential sub-plan links. PAC will evaluate these functional area plans in the fall for overall congruence with the strategic planning priorities. For example, how does the technology plan support the various strategic initiatives? How does the capital campaign plan potentially link back to strategic initiatives? Etc.

3. On schedule. Progress toward completing the goal or action is proceeding as planned. For example, task statements progressing toward an expected completion of July 2008 would fall here.
 4. Behind schedule. Current progress toward completing the goal or action is less than planned.
 5. Delete – abandoned. The goal or action has been abandoned because of other priorities.
 6. Delete – subsumed. The goal or action has been subsumed into another task statement.
- Based on this presentation and related discussion, PAC votes to accept or reject proposed retirements and deletions from the strategic plan by the mid-November meeting (if necessary). PAC-approved retirements and deletions are noted in the end-of-the year version of the strategic plan. **See [Appendix F](#)** for example. The IR Office also presents the SWOT survey findings. These will help provide context for consideration of strategic initiatives for the next planning/budgeting cycle. Finally, the PAC completes an end-of-the year self-evaluation of the college's planning performance.
 - In late November, the Office of Institutional Research releases the PAC Annual Report. This report will serve as the key reference tool to help the President, Division Chiefs, PAC and all stakeholders in planning for next year. Report includes:
 1. Past calendar year PAC meeting summary. A brief summary of the dates and major topics discussed at each meeting.
 2. Reports of Strategic Plan Reporters. Status reports for each initiative in the Strategic Plan, as reported by PAC members in early December.
 3. Strategic Plan with status updates. The College's current strategic plan by strategic initiative (including cross-referenced task number, responsible party, task statement, expected completion date, and status as of November).
 4. Institutional Effectiveness Assessment Measures. This report builds on data from the previous year to produce trends, and also includes appendices explaining in English issues such as how enrollment is calculated.
 5. Opportunities and Vulnerabilities Audit. Summary of SWOT analysis survey of campus planners.
 6. PAC Self-Assessment. Ratings of the effectiveness of planning and the PAC by its own members against the planning standards presented earlier in this report.

The PAC Annual Report will be widely distributed, public document informing all campus stakeholders on planning progress and institutional health.

- At the December PAC meeting, presentation by the President of strategic initiatives for the upcoming fiscal year with planning assumptions. The December Trustee meeting will also include the Strategic Plan Status Update and President's presentation of new strategic initiatives for the upcoming fiscal year. This data will help inform the Board of Trustees for the President's evaluation the following month.

Proposed first steps

Assuming NC State will implement this model for FY 2007-08, it should take the following steps during the fall of 2006, including but not limited to:

- Announcement of the Planning Model to the Board of Trustees in September and to employees during Fall In-Service Training, and distribution of summary materials on the model to internal and external stakeholders
- Appointment of a Planning Advisory Committee and Planning Champion.
- Training on the strategic planning process, including a planning retreat for the PAC (Sevier provides detailed training exercises and tips). Note: if budget permits, we should bring in someone from Carroll Community College to facilitate. They are open to this idea.
- Commission of a situational analysis (internal and external environment) on which to build planning assumptions and Presidential strategic initiatives. This could include enrollment trends, data gathered during the Achieving the Dream process, Community College Survey of Student Engagement data from spring 2006, local labor market data from state/federal databases, surveys of area business/industry, etc. Also, the Seiver book contains standard questions for each college functional area to help guide the situational analysis.
- Identification of institutional effectiveness assessment measures (does not include student learning outcomes), which PAC will select and recommend to the President. For example, Carroll Community College tracks indicators covering the areas of access and opportunity; student development and learning; baccalaureate preparation; workforce development; the teaching and learning environment; community outreach and lifelong learning; and resource development and use. It draws data from Maryland's version of HEI, its own internal databases, and surveys conducted by the IR office including CCSSE. It is recommended that the Institutional Research Office prepare a separate paper recommending means to identify effectiveness indicators.
- Consider selection of pilot functional area plans that will be developed in spring (i.e., technology, facilities, marketing communications, etc) to support strategic plan/task statements. Note these sub-plans may cross over multiple divisions like the Achieving the Dream planning document.
- Perhaps most important, there needs to be a regular communication vehicle to keep internal and external stakeholders abreast of the planning process. This communication must clear and concise, and direct interested readers to more detailed information through NC State's Intranet.