



WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

The Committee on University Strategic Planning (CUSP)
Report to the WMU Faculty Senate and University Community
November 24, 2015

Committee Members:

Dr. Richard Gershon, CUSP Chair, Communication

Dr. Jody Brylinsky, Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness

Dr. Louann Bierlein Palmer, Educational Leadership, Research and Technology

Dr. Susan Caulfield, School of Interdisciplinary Health Programs

Dr. Harold Glasser, Environmental and Sustainability Studies

Ms. Shari Glaser, Director, Parent and Family Programs, Division of Student Affairs

Dr. Mary Lagerwey, Nursing

Dr. James Leja, Chair, Blindness and Low Vision Studies

Dr. Jennifer Palthe, Management

Dr. Shaila Rao, Special Education and Literary Studies

Dr. Alan Rea, Business Information Systems

Mr. Anand Sankey, Director, Engineering Division, Facilities Management

Dr. Susan Stapleton, Dean, Graduate College

Ms. Patti VanWalbeck, Associate Vice President for Business and Finance

Dr. Geoff Whitehurst, Aviation Sciences

INTRODUCTION

In the spring semester of 2013, the Faculty Senate Executive Board under the direction of Faculty Senate President William Rantz, met with Dr. Jody Brylinsky, Associate Provost for Institutional Effectiveness at Western Michigan University for the purpose of creating the Committee on University Strategic Planning (CUSP). This committee was originally charged with serving as the university's main steering group in monitoring the process and outcomes of the university strategic plan. The CUSP is comprised of 15 faculty and professional staff who serve as representatives to the university strategic plan.

We begin this report by recognizing the commendable work of Dr. Brylinsky in developing the organizational structure that has become the WMU strategic plan. We also want to take a moment to acknowledge the important work of Brynne Belinger in providing much of the support work for the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. The CUSP also wants to recognize the many contributions of the University Strategic Planning Operations Team (USPOT), the seven tactical action committees (TACs) as well as the numerous project action teams (PATs). As before, we commend them all for their diligence and hard work. We now come to the close of the three-year planning cycle.

THE ROLE OF EVALUATION and CONTROL

Strategic planning is the set of managerial decisions and actions that determine the long term success of a business or nonprofit organization. Evaluation and control is critical to the success of any strategic planning effort. Evaluation and control can sometimes point out possible flaws in the original strategy, challenges associated with information and reporting and/or identify changing external conditions that may require an adjustment in the next phase of the planning process. The CUSP has been tasked with monitoring the implementation of the university strategic plan according to the charges set forth by the WMU Faculty Senate Executive Board. To that end, whatever limitations may exist in the design of the current strategic plan (and methods of reporting), we as a University have greatly exceeded anything that previously existed. We have established a culture, whereby, strategic planning has become an integral part of the academic and professional thinking on campus.

We take a moment to highlight some of the key observations contained in both the October 2013 and November 2014 CUSP reports. In the final section of this report, we conclude with a set of recommendations for the University to consider as we move into the next phase of strategic planning.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2012-2013

October 2013 CUSP Report

In the October 2013 CUSP report, we commented at the time that developing a university-wide strategic plan presents both an opportunity as well as significant challenges in terms of the plan's successful implementation. The task at hand is to fully engage the University community as to the importance of the strategic plan and to ensure a commitment in terms of delivering requested information for the purpose of measurement and evaluation.

At issue, is the fact that the university strategic plan presupposes an equal buy-in from the entire University leadership across campus. It further assumes that all administrators responsible for gathering and organizing data are equal to the task in terms of providing what's needed. The evidence to date would suggest that not all departments and operational units on campus are fully engaged with the task at hand. There is a wide difference in the quality and depth of reporting. Most units on campus have filed a strategic planning effectiveness report; some have not.

One of the key recommendations coming out of the October 2013 CUSP report is the need for an improved framework (or master checklist) that identifies all the major academic and operational units on campus. There needs to be better buy-in from individual departments on campus. The framework should be data driven with clear key performance indicators (KPIs) and provide a common basis of comparison on

a year-to-year basis. Otherwise, the material that appears in the year-end end report appears to be random and anecdotal rather than deliberate and planned.

A second important recommendation coming out of our report is that not all information is equally valuable. There needs to be an attempt to prioritize information in terms of project scale and level of importance. In developing future reports, a distinction needs to be made between major project initiatives whose progress can be tracked across a three-year time period versus representative examples that speak to the five goals of the strategic plan.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2013-2014

November 2014 CUSP Report

In reviewing the Strategic Plan 2013-2014 report, the CUSP group felt that there was marked improvement in the organization and reporting of data – when compared to the previous year's report. The quality and depth of reporting was significantly better in terms of the information being presented. The measurable outcomes were easier to identify. One of the obvious challenges is establishing causality; that is, whether the good works performed on campus is the result of the strategic plan or simply individual departments and units doing their job well.

During year two – there was greater engagement across campus in terms of departmental and area units participating with regard to the five major goals of the University. According to the strategic report, the largest number of target goals met was in Goal #2. Promote Innovative Learning, discovery and service (pg. 16).

In this report, the OIE introduces for the reader the Strategic Management Maturity Model (SMMM). Several attendees commented that they found this to be an interesting approach to self-observation. The SMMM model contains five levels and dimensions. According to the authors, WMU can be considered at level 3: *Structured and Proactive* (p. 21). A typical level three organization has formal structures and processes in place to support strategic planning and management. In practical terms, this means that all the major constituencies on campus recognize the University's commitment to the strategic plan. The activities that occur on a regular basis are expected to lead to varying degrees of process improvement over time.

One of the important conversation points that occurred during our CUSP meeting turned on the question of what constitutes a major research university. The CUSP fully recognizes the importance of Federal research dollars and grants. The present report clearly identifies such information. At the same time, CUSP feels that a lack of information pertaining to faculty publications and creative activities represents a serious omission of information. There is a disconnect between faculty doing research and creative activity on campus and the OIE's 2013-2014 strategic plan report. The current reporting structure does not account for these activities which represent a major amount of faculty time across all departments.

Another consideration is related to data reporting. There are a number of crossover points between the Academic Strategic Plan and the University Strategic Plan. And while individual colleges may align their goals with the strategic plan; the challenge remains how to standardize and capture whether individual colleges are meeting the five goals of the university strategic plan.

Three important recommendations were identified in the 2014 CUSP report:

1. We need to clarify the relationship between the Academic Strategic Plan and the University Strategic Plan. There are a number of crossover points that can make the reporting of college performance measures a lot more meaningful.
2. Develop a representative sample of university professors who are doing creative and engaging research that is nationally recognized. The goal is to illustrate some (not all) professors who have achieved national and/or international recognition. We should also identify both graduate and undergraduate students who have achieved national and/or international recognition for research and/or professional accomplishment.

3. In order to capture faculty research performance on campus; more time should be spent improving the current PAR system of reporting. As one committee member indicated, the system needs to be more data driven which would allow us to better share the important work of the faculty.

STRATEGIC PLAN 2014-2015

November 2015 CUSP Report

The 2014-2015 Strategic Plan demonstrated significant improvement in data collection and standardization of strategic plan reporting. To better improve the reporting structure, members of the senior leadership team, University-level centers and institutes and Provost's Council were asked to supply 3-5 priority initiatives during the 2014-2015 academic year. Additionally, they were asked to classify each priority initiative as either "Impact" or "Operational" initiatives. Impact initiatives were defined as activities WMU units do to achieve strategic goals, while operational initiatives were defined as strategies to improve how WMU units work.

According to the 2014-2015 Strategic Report, WMU continued to refine its strategic planning efforts by focusing on strategic priority areas based on previous outcome data contained in earlier reports. In general, the University has made progress by "completing 83% of the 166 identified priority initiatives and ten implementation recommendations. Many of the initiatives marked as "Not Met" were the result of not having annual benchmarks established for multiple-year projects."

Of particular note, was the first set of discussions concerning how to use enterprise risk management as part of the university strategic planning process going forward. Also noteworthy, is the continuation of the Healthy Campus 2020 tactical action community as a standing committee within the WMU wellness structure. University centers and institutes played a more important role toward the improved understanding of strategic goals on campus.

Finally, progress is reported on WMU's maturity in strategic plan management. While WMU remains at Level 3: Structured and Proactive, in the Strategic Management Maturity Model, the University has steadily embraced the principles of strategic planning when it comes to academic program review, prioritizing program offerings, budgeting and allocation of resources, etc.

Office of Institutional Effectiveness Report: Select Recommendations

In concluding its report, the OIE listed a number of takeaway lessons that should be given full consideration as we prepare for the next phase in university strategic planning. In our view, these are some of the most important:

- The next iteration of the University Strategic Plan should move University structures to a more mature planning management platform with standardized reporting terminology, accountability measures, and prioritization.
- Incorporate enterprise risk management principles into strategic planning, implementation, and reporting.
- The revised University Strategic Plan should be for five years in order to allow both long and short-term goals to be achieved. Objectives and strategies should have annual benchmarks to measure progress during the five years.
- University centers and institutes need to be considered significant partners in achieving University goals and priorities, and therefore continue to be included in plan reporting and accountability.
- The need for University data analytics requires that the method of strategic plan reporting evolve to a solution that allows for efficient data mining and assessment. This includes utilizing technology (software) designed specifically for strategic planning.
- The University needs to continue to work toward greater planning integration of budget and strategic goals at all levels. (2015-2015 Strategic Planning Report, p. 22).

RELATED MATTERS TO UNIVERSITY STRATEGIC PLANNING

Academic Program Review and Planning (APRP)

One of the important activities that took place during the 2014–2015 academic year was the successful implementation of the Academic Program Review and Planning (APRP) initiative undertaken by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. The APRP represents a major effort to systematically review and evaluate all major academic programs and majors on campus. It signifies an important step in taking responsibility for the quality of WMU's educational program offerings. The results of this University-wide self-study is not captured in the 2014-2015 strategic report since it pertains more directly to academic affairs. However, the ongoing conversations about program improvement demonstrates a larger commitment to strategic planning and the future of the University's academic mission.

University Strategic Planning Transition Team

August 2015, President Dunn met with the senior leadership of this University to discuss some of the changes that should be incorporated into the next round of strategic planning. The comments and suggestions from the CUSP group provided some important feedback in terms of structure and approach. A new strategic planning transition team was created with the goal of formulating a set of recommended strategies going forward. The composition of this group consists of various professional and academic representatives from across campus. This group is not tasked with rewriting the strategic plan. Rather, they will receive a number of information comments and suggestions from various stakeholders on campus with the goal of making recommendations to the senior leadership with respect to priorities, structure and approach. The timeline for completion is spring 2016.

University Strategic Plan Steering Committee

After the transition team completes its work, the recommendations put forth will provide the substantive basis for the future 2020 plan. To that end, a University-wide Steering Committee is expected to be formed to provide the oversight of the 2020 Strategic Plan's implementation.

THE 2020 STRATEGIC PLAN: OUR VIEW

During the past three years, we have seen a major transition in terms of all units on campus embracing the importance of strategic planning and recognizing at different levels the three pillars of the University as well as the five primary strategic goals. The level of reporting has steadily improved during this time and has become part of the culture of the University. As noted earlier, we have already greatly exceeded what has been done previously.

As we look to the future, the 2020 strategic plan has to be designed and built in a manner that goes beyond the current senior leadership on campus. The strategic goals and priorities set forward have to reflect what we value as being the most important to the future of the University. One of the important takeaway lessons from our current strategic plan is the importance of buy-in and participation from all the various stakeholders on campus. This means that all areas of the University including academic affairs, campus planning, student affairs and professional staff need to be fully represented. The current makeup of the transition team is a first step in that direction. Based on comments and suggestions from the CUSP, we make the following recommendations going forward.

Recommendations and Suggestions

1) Simplify the 2020 Strategic Plan

It has been suggested by various members of the CUSP, that when it comes time to develop the 2020 strategic plan – that we give serious consideration to a more streamlined version. Instead of multiple operational goals – we focus our attention on 10-15 major strategic goals to be accomplished by the year 2020. This does not preclude individual colleges, departments and units on campus from continuing in the good work that they're already doing.

The point was made that with multiple strategic and priority objectives – developing a simple process of review becomes difficult (if not impossible) to achieve. There needs to be a rethinking in terms of what constitutes strategic goals versus operational goals.

2) Linking the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan with the University Strategic Plan

Several members of the CUSP commented on the fact that there needs to be better coordination between the mission of the Academic Strategic Plan and the University Strategic Plan. There are a number of crossover points when it comes to major academic initiatives including the WMU Cooley Law School; the future Ph.D. Physical Therapy program; possible relocation of select WMU's aviation course offerings and training in Punta Gorda, Florida. These undertakings clearly represent major strategic planning initiatives that involve a major commitment by the University in terms of faculty and resources.

Related to this same idea is the question of assessing the efficacy of five University goals such as being discovery driven and being globally engaged. How do we capture that data within the academic side of the equation?

3) Strategic Goal # 3. Advance WMU as a Major Research University

As noted earlier, the CUSP fully recognizes the importance of Federal research dollars and grants. The OIE's three annual strategic planning reports fully capture that information. What's missing is information pertaining to faculty publications and creative activities during the academic year. The current OIE reporting structure does not account for these activities which in our view represents a serious omission of information. But more importantly, it fails to recognize the very real accomplishments of WMU faculty that speaks directly to the goal of being a Research I. "discovery driven" institution.

4) Improve the PAR Reporting System

In order to capture faculty research and creative activity on campus, more time should be spent improving the current PAR system of reporting. As one committee member indicated, the system needs to be more data driven which would allow us to better understand and recognize the important work of the faculty. The current PAR format and design can be greatly improved.

5) Western Michigan University: Identity and Academic Mission

One of the topical ideas that have come up in various CUSP meetings is the question of our academic identity. Who are we as an academic institution? What is our academic mission? More specifically, what distinguishes Western Michigan University from other academic institutions both in the state of Michigan as well as the U.S.? It is recommended that the WMU Faculty Senate host a series of forums on the question of academic mission. Specifically, these forums should address a number of subtopic issues including:

- The teaching and research mission
- Academic excellence, programs of distinction
- The changing student audience
- Branding strategy as it pertains to academic mission

6) Student Recruitment and Enrollment Management

Several members of the CUSP group mentioned that we need to be more creative and nimble when it comes to student recruitment (i.e., high school completion as well as community college 2+2 programs).

Other members of the CUSP made the point that the changing demographics of our students makes recruiting nontraditional students ever more important. Specifically, older returning students represent an important part of student base. To that end, we need to be more creative and supportive when it comes to evaluating student credit hours, professional and life experiences etc. There also needs to be a more concerted effort to engage faculty, where appropriate, to be part of the enrollment strategy.

7) Integrated Brand Management Strategy

The term *branding* has to do with establishing a consistent organizational identity. In the field of media and communications, *brand owned media* refers to the goal of having a consistent identity and consistent message across different media platforms. In our view, there needs to be a better tie-in between various stakeholders on campus (i.e., University relations, the University website, development, student

recruitment and athletics). We recommend a more integrated approach when it comes to brand management issues.

Examples:

- Refine Western Michigan University brand positioning statement
- Refine student and parent visitation experience to the Western campus
- Develop a more integrated approach between colleges and academic departments involving digital storytelling for the University website.

8) Communication to a Larger Audience

Committee members continued to express the fact that there is an apparent disconnect between the findings of the OIE strategic planning reports and the Office of University Relations. More effort should be made to highlight the important features of this report for a larger audience. Otherwise, the OIE year-end report is targeted to a very select readership.

9) Revising the Mission and Scope of CUSP

It has been suggested that the Committee on University Strategic Planning continue in its present role. While the new 2020 plan may require a different kind of oversight, there remains a need for faculty involvement in reviewing the university's strategic plan and implementation on a regular basis.

It has been suggested that CUSP take a more proactive position in discussing and evaluating individual strategies. It has also been suggested that CUSP meet more frequently during the academic year.

Concluding Remarks

The future 2020 plan should provide a focal point in determining high priority issues for the University. It can and should support the University's three pillars, mission statement as well as five major University goals.

If the 2020 strategic plan is going to be meaningful, it has to be clear in its intention. There has to be University buy-in from all stakeholders on campus. And more importantly, there needs to be a University-wide commitment and understanding of what we are trying to accomplish. A clear set of priority goals makes that process a lot easier to implement. In the end, the 2020 strategic plan should make us better as a University in very practical and applied ways.