

## Strategic Planning: Academic Planning Meeting, 16 June 2014

In attendance: Randall Grometstein, Chair, Jenn Berg (guest), Brian Bercier (guest), Eric Budd (guest), Cathy Canney, Chris Cratsley (guest), Jane Fiske, Lisa Gim, Mike Leamy (guest), Linda LeBlanc, Chris Picone, Samuel Tobin, Michael Turk.

*[To improve readability these minutes are not strictly chronological. CP]*

1. We went over the minutes from May and changed “Visa Project” to “Vision Project.” Minutes accepted unanimously by those who attended the May meeting

2. Next meeting times and dates:

- **Tuesday 8 July, 10:30 AM.** Room TBD.
- August ?
- Thursday Sept 4 and Sept. 18, 3:30 PM
- Thursday Oct. 2, 16, and 30, 3:30 PM
- Thursday Nov 6, 3:30 PM.
- After Nov 6 TBD.

### **3. Clarifying the charge of this subcommittee.**

We currently have the charge written below, amended with text in red from our June meeting

*This Working Group of the SPC is responsible for addressing the challenges and opportunities of understanding and shaping the operational planning and delivery of Fitchburg State’s academic programs, and to do it ways that help speak to the direction and requirements of **the university’s Mission as a “comprehensive university”** and the state’s Vision Project. It is particularly important to provide programs that will attract students over the next decade and structure delivery of the programs in ways most likely to encourage student retention and completion.*

Following this paragraph are 7 questions for us to consider as our charge, and these have been posted to Blackboard for discussion.

**The goal of our meeting in July will be to decide whether each of these 7 questions will remain in our charge, or if any should be modified, dropped, or if there are other ways to organize the questions. Once we settle on our specific questions should decide what data we need to start answering them.**

RG: We are going to split our vision, externally and internally. What are the general trends in higher education so we can justify any trends we want to pursue internally? FSU is vital to N Central MA. When students want training, why come to us?

CP: There have been changes to our charge from the original description of the committee to what we were given in May. LA&S was part of the original description but was omitted in the current charge. The recent questions also added a focus on MA Vision Project and cooperation across institutions. How did those changes happen, and can we simplify our charge into fewer questions?

JF: Robin Bowen wrote the original committee descriptions that were sent out via the MSCA, but then the descriptions were modified by the consultants.

It would be helpful for us to attend meetings of the Strategic Planning Council (SPC) which consists of chairs of each subcommittee plus a few others. That way we can make sure sub-committees are taking consistent approaches where necessary and focus on the big picture.

### The MA Vision Project

- Several people prefer to “disengage the Vision Project”, while LA&S is essential. Our charge should match the FSU Mission statement that has changed in the last few years from small college to a comprehensive university.
- However, the BHE Commissioner (Freeland) has engaged Boards of Trustees to make sure that Strategic Plans align with Vision Statement. The Vision Statement does not need to be our focus, but it should not be “orthogonal” to our Strategic Plan.
- Resolution. We amended the opening paragraph of our charge to emphasize that Academic Planning will be based around the FSU Mission statement, while retaining MA Vision Project as part of our charge where it complements FSU’s Mission.

### Organizing our questions

In our discussions, several options were mentioned to organize our more specific questions.

Option A: Leave the seven questions separate as they are now. We might modify some of the language in July. The 7 questions were intended to help us get started, not fetter us.

Option B: Consider our charge as two tasks.

1. What should FSU offer for workforce alignment? What are the future career trajectories that we can help students meet? (An example that was done for STEM careers was posted to the Discussion Board.)
2. What are the common (LA&S) skills that FSU should teach all students as a “liberal arts university”?
  - However, this binary distinction does a disservice to the comprehensive aspect of FSU, and a disservice to the many students who are in pre-professional majors. Furthermore, employers are asking for many of the skills of a liberal arts education, such as effective communication and information literacy. So these are not separate tasks. Our goal is to serve all students: we should emphasize the connection between professional and LA&S programs.
  - This binary distinction also leaves out the critical charge of retention and completion.

Option C. Organize our charge under three questions: what does success look like before, during and after students are here?

1. How do we **attract students**? For example, what professional programs are out there, what careers are emerging, etc.
2. How do we **retain students**? : For example, how can we structure curricula (including LA&S) to help retention? Would placement exams and other competency-based assessments play a role here?
3. What are the **skills** employers (and grad schools?) need from educated students.

Option D. A different set of organizing questions

1. What are our shared institutional **learning outcomes and priorities**? Those are not only LA&S goals, but outcomes of programs, too.
2. What are the most **effective learning strategies**? The AAC&U has 7 strategies for effective learning that engage students and improve retention. Consider approaches like learning communities, internships, etc.
3. What are the optimal **delivery methods**? Consider scheduling, online learning, etc.

Option E. Another set of organizing questions.

1. What do we want to look like in 5 years?
2. What will the student look like in 5 years?
  - e.g., 80% of current middle school students will take an online course in next 5 years. What will those courses look like at FSU? e-texts will replace paper texts, not just in online courses. Perhaps with changes to MA testing students will have more experience annotating e-texts, testing on computers, etc.
  - e.g., demographic trends
3. What are the issues that will challenge us?
4. How do we strategically plan so our students are “armed” for future?

**4. Getting Data** (Also see notes from May). What data do we want, and what can Academic Affairs (AA) provide for information?

- **Student retention and completion rates.** RG presented data from the AA website, up to the entering class from 2009. Though these numbers are low, they are “the norm.” A large part of low retention is due to financial constraints. Those data do not include students who transfer into FSU (which are 30% of our students). Those who transfer out are treated the same as those who drop out. (But we can now get a 6 yr graduation rate for students who left for another institution.)
  - Note: focusing on retention and completion can impair academic quality! Eg., Commissioner Freeland wants fewer students taking remediation courses because many who take those classes do not complete their degree. This is a classic “correlation-causation error.”
  - Let's go back to the FSU Mission. Retention is marbled into everything we should do. Our students grapple with poor reading skills: we must deal with the reality we have.
- **Trends in enrollment**
- **Trends in employment**
- We need data on the **jobs students get after FSU**. We have some data, but not much: Alumni surveys as well as graduating student surveys.
- **What do employers want in terms of learning outcomes?** That can be in LA&S as well as professional programs. We don't want discussion in two different directions; think more holistically.
  - Here is where this subcommittee connects to LA&S Council. This committee could say we should be focusing on information literacy, or reading skills, or lifelong learning. What are the skills FSU should be teaching?
  - We could argue that because of our liberal arts education, students should be able to ADAPT better to a changing workforce, with critical reading and thinking skills, lifelong learning skills. How do we set ourselves up to prepare students for **lifelong learning**?
  - Creating lifelong learners is a challenge. For example, check our students' scores in the College Student Inventory (CSI). Our student response is often low to questions like “I like to read” or “I get satisfaction from solving complex problems.” SAT reading scores are low, but as a comprehensive university we need to teach everyone.
  - Reading skills for online materials are different from traditional reading.

5. There was much discussion about question 3 concerning **cost efficiency of programs**.

- We need to try to connect what we plan with COSTS. What will it cost us to implement our plan? What if enrollment goes down? The last Strategic Plan did not connect well with financial constraints. That was also a NEASC weakness: separate tracks of academic planning and capital planning.
- There should be a decoupling of revenue issues before there is a recoupling. We should answer what we should look like as an institution, then LATER settle issues about costs. If we consider costs (question 2, 3) too early we might self-censor.
- Should we drop questions about financial issues (2,3)? Is that question “above our pay grade”? Some felt that we must address this. If not, someone else will decide which programs get cut or increased. This list (dept. dashboard of costs) is already generated so we need to respond.
- What will we really do with the revenue data? For example, we will not get rid of the philosophy dept despite a lack of majors. We will not get rid of nursing just because it is expensive. We have programs that lose money: we need to make a case through our mission as a comprehensive university. Use the FSU Mission to justify strengthening programs.
- Some programs are safe because they have pre-professional accreditors. Often the safe programs are very expensive. But what about programs like psychology and philosophy that could take cuts to faculty and still run?
- The cost/revenue data are suspect in places. The dashboard pretends that Humanities brings in no revenue because it has no majors.
- Perhaps we could reframe how the cost/revenue data are interpreted. Can we redirect question 3 so it is about more than dollars. We must consider the value/function/contribution of programs, not just their cost.

**6. Miscellaneous topics**

Linda LeBlanc will represent our subcommittee at the SPC meeting June 26 since Randall cannot attend that day.

*Submitted by Chris Picone*