

Strategic Planning: Academic Planning Meeting, 29 May 2014

In attendance: Randall Grometstein, Chair, Eric Budd (guest), Cathy Canney, Jane Fiske, Donna Foley, Lisa Gim, Kate Jewell, Mike Leamy, Linda LeBlanc, Chris Picone, Linda Richelson (guest), Thomas Rousseau (guest), Ammad Sheikh, Samuel Tobin, Karen Valeri, Paul Weizer.

Randall Grometstein began by reading aloud the charge of the Strategic Planning Committee on Academic Planning, and the group at large discussed the charge and the potential other questions that we might want to add and address.

1. *Does Fitchburg State provide courses and academic services in ways most likely to retain students and encourage/facilitate degree completion with all deliberate speed?*
 - a. *Are major or program requirements clear, as simple as possible, and well communicated? Should there be any changes?*
 - b. *Are offerings provided at days and times that take into account students' need to work either to support attending the university or because they are in a chosen profession and working to change or improve their credentials or skills?*
 - c. *What role do online courses play at Fitchburg State? Are they being used well and should there be any changes in how they are used? Are they being produced efficiently or is there significant duplication of effort? What roles will online courses play in the future and what trajectory of change is required to be prepared for that future?*
 - d. *What role should competency-based education and prior learning assessments play at Fitchburg State?*

We thought some of these were already addressed in the NEASC report of 2012.

For question 1d on competency-based education we can look to modular Basic Math as an example. Students can go at their own pace, and whether they move on is based on whether they can accomplish something rather than simply sit in a class and check it off their list of requirements.

2. *Are there new programs that should be considered in the context of what Fitchburg State does now that would attract additional students; that are feasible within constrained resources; that could be positioned well within the competitive landscape; and that fit well with the mission?*

Randall pointed out that this is one of the few questions that look to the future, while questions, 1, 3 and 5 really examine what we do now.

3. *Which programs cost more to deliver than the revenues they bring in? To what extent should such programs be supported with other revenues? When and how should it be decided whether such programs should be redirected?*

Paul Weizer will send a spreadsheet to our Blackboard site that was shared with dept chairs (and faculty) last year. The spreadsheet only examines direct revenue and direct expenses; it does not account for IT, Facilities, student support services, phone, utilities, etc. But department equipment DOES count (e.g., microscopes). Nursing is expensive, Political Science is cheap. But other factors affect a whether program should grow or not.

4. *How should the strongest programs be maintained and strengthened? How might they serve more students than now?*

So what ARE our strongest programs? Some of those answers will be financial.

5. *Should there be an effort to cooperate more with sister universities around the state to the advantage of both? What areas hold promise for increased cooperation?*

We just bought specialized distance ed equipment so distance classes can be held in real time. From a similar distance ed room off campus, students can see the teacher, ask questions, and vice versa. This allows us to offer unique courses (e.g., Arabic) and fill the class with students from sister schools, and they can do the same with our students. FSU is testing this equipment out in fall 2014 with Nursing LPN to BSN. (Just for lectures: nursing clinicals will still be in person.)

6. *The Massachusetts Vision Project has seven key outcome goals, as follows:*
- a. **COLLEGE PARTICIPATION** *Raising the percentage of high school graduates going to college—and the readiness of these students for college-level work.*
 - b. **COLLEGE COMPLETION** *Increasing the percentage of students who complete degree and certificate programs.*
 - c. **STUDENT LEARNING** *Achieving higher levels of student learning through better assessment and more extensive use of assessment results.*
 - d. **WORKFORCE ALIGNMENT** *Aligning occupationally oriented degree and certificate programs with the needs of statewide, regional and local employers.*
 - e. **PREPARING CITIZENS** *Providing students with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to be active, informed citizens.*
 - f. **ELIMINATION OF DISPARITIES** *Closing achievement gaps among students from different ethnic, racial, gender and income groups in all areas of educational progress.*
 - g. **RESEARCH** *Conducting research that drives economic development.*

To what extent are these goals already integrated into Fitchburg State's academic programs and what more needs to be done to assure fulfillment of the university's role in the state? To aid in this effort, at least one member of the WG should become an expert on the Vision Project.

The Vision Project is a brainchild of the BHE and commissioner Richard Freland, from around 3 years ago.

PARCC [which is replacing MCAS testing our public schools] is in response to 6a. The state is trying to increase readiness for college. MA already has a very high % of high school students attending college.

This subcommittee should check FSU's Mission, Vision, and Core Values and make sure we are consistent. Cathy passed around a flier. (Was this flier from a strategic plan for 2009-2014, or was it the revised Values, Mission and Vision that were redone just before NEASC?)

Randall looks forward to hearing how assessment of student learning (6c) is going.

Paul W thought Civic Engagement should be here in the Vision statement in 6e.

Eric Budd raised the question of where the LA&S belongs in terms of the discussion in the strategic plan. There was extensive discussion of this, since this committee already has many charges. The LA&S overlaps with parts of questions 1 and 6 but perhaps deserves a more explicit focus. It was concluded that the LA&S could be dealt with in both the Academic Planning Committee as well as in the Academic Values Committee.

To address this, Chris Picone suggested the following as a 7th question to consider:

7. *How could the LAS Program better meet the needs of students and goals of the Vision Project? What general recommendations can the Strategic Plan make to the LAS Council as they undergo a Program Review in AY2015?*
- Do the five LAS Goals (and added NEASC goals) meet student needs?*
 - Does the LAS curriculum meet student needs?*
 - Does our LAS Assessment program satisfy goals of the MA Vision Project, especially parts 6c and 6e above?*

We were also charged with the following question, but we decided to drop it:

7. *To what extent has Fitchburg State taken advantage of the state's Performance Incentive Fund to support achievement of Vision Project goals?*

There has been money for a Developmental Math coordinator, but only for 1 more year.

With state \$ FSU would like to improve the process for rejected students. Map out what they could take at a community college, and then transfer to FSU easily. Make sure they use financial aid effectively. Many students do not know or use a clear path. We are working with MWCC, QCC, and Worc State. "Sorry we cannot accept you, but if you do this then you can be part of class of ___"

GENERAL TOPICS

Randall wondered what level of recommendation we make with this committee. How specific should we be? For example,

- "We should madly expand our STEM programs."
- "Expand distance education?"
- "Do we need to grow our Masters programs?"
- Paul suggested that we do not need minutiae about academic plan.

Paul Weizer suggested that one major area for this committee to consider is the shrinking pool of college age students in the future. He suggested further that the committee might reflect on different ways to shift growth toward retention of student numbers. He emphasized that academic planning would want to consider all types of students – not just day but also our evening, graduate and continuing education populations, institutionally.

He mentioned the Vision Project as an example of such assessment.

Some populations will expand (e.g., Hispanic) so how can we match those demographic changes?

Paul suggested that the committee proceed by setting up a schedule of ideas and issues to consider, as a way to move forward. Other groups in the Strategic Planning group have followed the structure of discussion groups and have put issues up on Blackboard discussion boards and have opened up discussion threads. Additionally, he mentioned that they have invited guests to committees to speak to various issues. Creating surveys are another way that the committees have sought to reach out to faculty and other groups to draw input.

Cathy Canney added that consulting and using data is a useful way to proceed. Paul and Cathy emphasized that a whole array of data is available to the working groups. There was general discussion about the kinds of data that this planning group might find useful. Randall Grometstien asked what kinds of contributions might be made if departments shared their data. Paul replied that he was not sure how

many departments could contribute useful data, but he stressed that the College Board and Admissions Office keep much data that could be of use to the committee. Cathy Canney added that this group could ask for data to also assess trends external to this particular institution.

Paul suggested that we try to project forward for 3-5 years ahead. Cathy Canney added that the EPC group analyzing trends might have produced some useful data for us concerning the percentage of college students that may exist in the future.

Paul affirmed again that if we want data, the university could provide it.

Randall added that looking broadly across higher education, there has been a gradual increase of numbers, but that population groups in different areas are also subject to different trends. She emphasized that we need to be aware of demographic shifts and trends in both higher education and in Massachusetts itself, and referred the group to the online readings posted for us to study. Inside Higher Ed is excellent, as is Anatomy of a College Tuition, which will be posted to Blackboard.

The group agreed that by September 1, we hope to have some answers to the seven stated questions in the committee's charge,

The group resolved to meet at 3:30 on Thursdays as possible during the fall semester.

Our next meeting date was tentatively set for June 16 at either 10:00 or 4:00.

Respectfully submitted by Lisa Gim and Chris Picone