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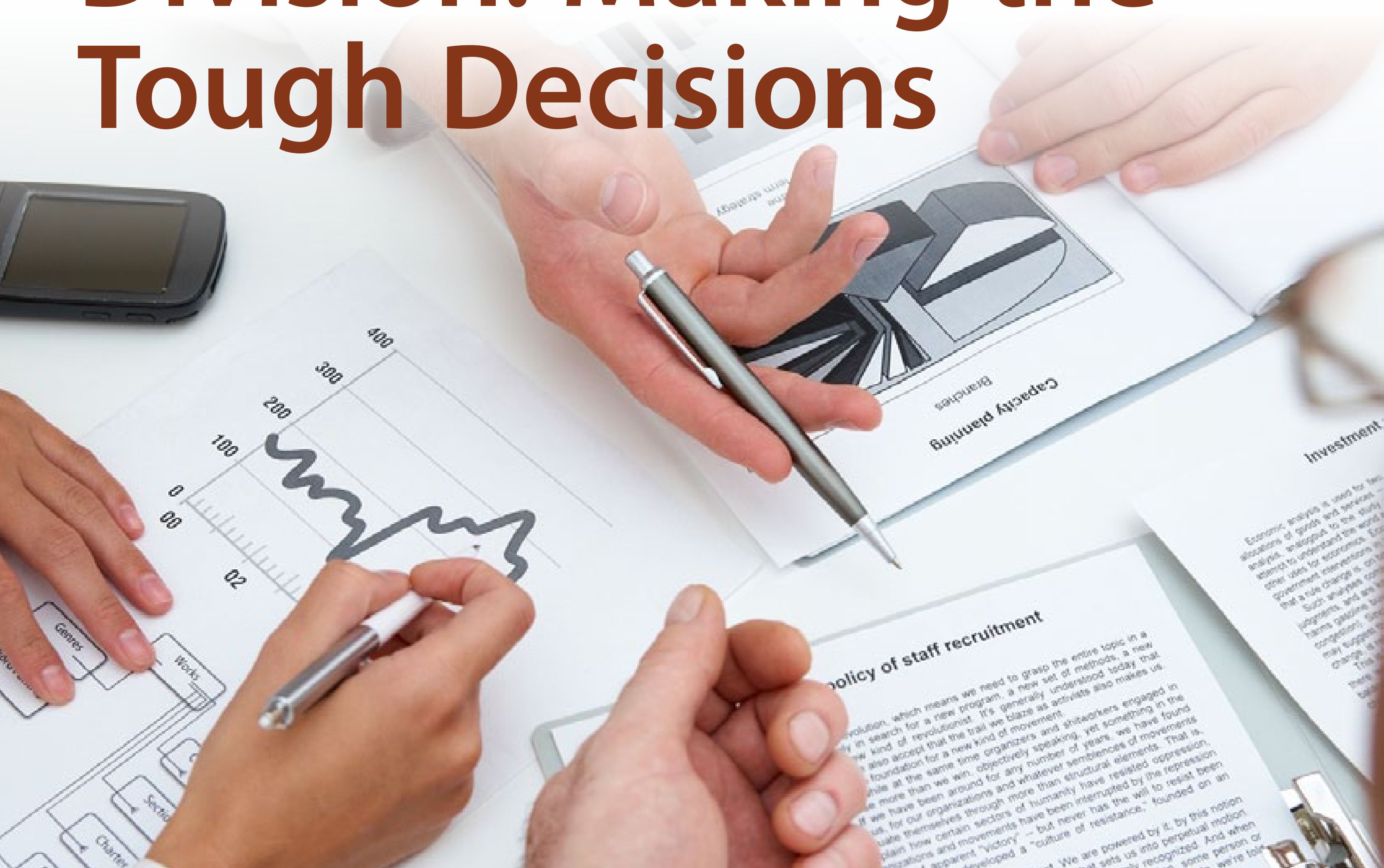
MONTHLY DIAGNOSTIC
March 2012

Setting and Funding Priorities for Your Division: Making the Tough Decisions



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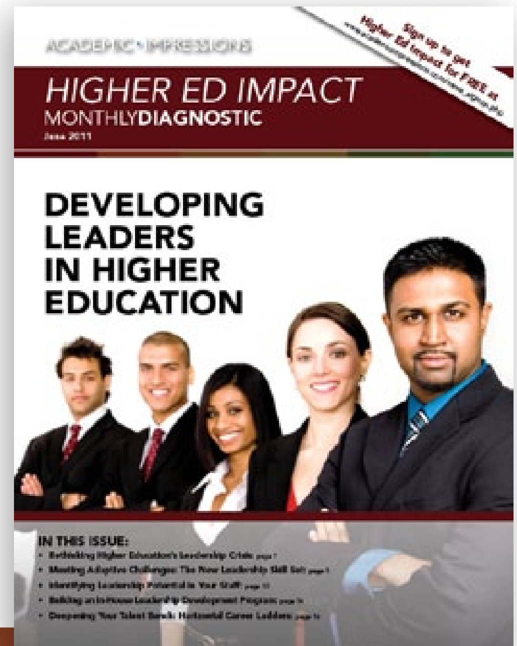

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A LETTER FROM AMIT MRIG
PRESIDENT, ACADEMIC IMPRESSIONS

As institutions face increasing financial constraints, they frequently ramp up fundraising efforts in order to secure new funds — rather than asking the tough questions about how to spend existing funds more wisely.

Oftentimes, guidance from an institution-wide plan is vague or missing altogether. But because the majority of decisions that impact how an institution's resources are expended are made at the division or college level, vice presidents, deans, and department heads have tremendous influence for ensuring maximum value from every dollar and person.

It's critical to establish a credible process for setting and funding several key priorities for your division, in order to gain your team's commitment and ensure successful execution. Doing so can build trust — internally and externally — as resources are used more effectively to serve the institution.

This edition will walk you through such a process, with input from past institutional presidents, provosts, chief financial officers, and division heads. We hope their advice will be useful to you.

MONTHLY DIAGNOSTIC ONLINE

Download this PDF and read this issue's articles online:
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AI Contributors

Amit Mrig
PRESIDENT, ACADEMIC IMPRESSIONS

Amit co-founded Academic Impressions in 2002 to provide a variety of educational products and services that help higher education administrators tackle key, strategic challenges. Since 2002, AI has designed and directed hundreds of conferences and has served representatives from over 3,500 higher education institutions. Besides designing and leading events for cabinet-level officers focused on strategic planning, budgeting, and leadership development, Amit leads Academic Impressions' ongoing research into the five- and 10 year challenges facing higher education and plays a lead role in outlining each issue of *Higher Ed Impact: Monthly Diagnostic* to highlight how college and university leaders can take an institution-wide approach to answering those challenges.

Daniel Fusch
DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH AND PUBLICATIONS, ACADEMIC IMPRESSIONS

At Academic Impressions, Daniel provides strategic direction and content for AI's electronic publication *Higher Ed Impact*, including market research and interviews with leading subject matter experts on critical issues. Since the publication's launch in 2009, Daniel has written more than 250 articles on strategic issues ranging from student recruitment and retention to development and capital planning. Daniel previously served as a conference director for Academic Impressions, developing training programs focused on issues related to campus sustainability, capital planning, and facilities management. Prior to joining Academic Impressions, Daniel served as adjunct faculty for the University of Denver. Daniel holds a Ph.D. in English.

Contributors

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PRESIDENT EMERITUS, UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Robert C. Dickeson provides counsel from multiple leadership perspectives: chair of the governor's cabinets in two states, university president, business CEO, and foundation executive. Dickeson served as the director of the department of administration and chair of the cabinet of Arizona Gov. Bruce Babbitt; and chief of staff, executive director of the office of state planning and budget, and chair of the cabinet of Colorado Gov. Roy Romer. He served in administrative posts at three universities and was president of the University of Northern Colorado from 1981-91. He served as president and CEO of Noel-Levitz Centers Inc., division president of USA Enterprises Inc., and senior vice president of USA Group Inc., heading the USA Group Foundation. From 2000 to 2005, he was co-founder and senior vice president of Lumina Foundation for Education.

While at Lumina Foundation, he led the national initiative on college costs, based on his monograph, "Collision Course: Rising College Costs Threaten America's Future and Require Shared Solutions" (Lumina Foundation, 2004). His book, *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services* (Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999, 2010) was based on his extensive consulting experiences including serving several hundred two- and four-year colleges (private and public) and corporations ranging from hospitals to bank holding companies. During 2006, he served as senior policy adviser to the Spellings Commission on the Future of Higher Education.

Larry Goldstein
PRESIDENT, CAMPUS STRATEGIES, LLC

Larry is the president of Campus Strategies, LLC, a higher education management consulting firm. His consulting interests cover a wide range of topics, including higher education budgeting, strategic planning, accounting, and finance. He writes and speaks frequently on these topics. He is the author of *College and University Budgeting: An Introduction for Faculty and Academic Administrators*, and he has co-authored several publications, including Presidential Transitions.

Immediately prior to establishing Campus Strategies, LLC, Larry served as senior vice president and treasurer of the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO). He joined NACUBO after spending 20 years in higher education financial administration. In his last campus position, he served as the University of Louisville's chief financial officer. Before that, he held administrative appointments with The University of Chicago, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and the University of Virginia.

Lucie Lapovsky
PRINCIPAL, LAPOVSKY CONSULTING; PAST PRESIDENT, MERCY COLLEGE

Lucie is an economist who consults, writes, and speaks widely on issues related to higher education leadership, governance, finance, strategy, and enrollment management. Much of her recent work has been with boards of trustees on issues of leadership and effectiveness. Lucie previously served as president of Mercy College, a diverse, multi-campus college of 10,000 undergraduate and graduate students with New York City, Westchester, and online campuses. She serves on a number of boards and advisory committees, including the boards of HERS, the American Public University System, Western New England College, Packer Collegiate Institute, the Tuition Exchange, the National Council for Research on Women, and the White House Project. Lucie is the editor of one book and the author of more than 100 chapters and articles.

Patrick Sanaghan
PRESIDENT, THE SANAGHAN GROUP

Dr. Sanaghan is the president of The Sanaghan Group, an organizational firm specializing in leadership development, executive coaching, strategic planning, and leadership transitions. Pat has worked with more than 100 campuses and hundreds of organizations in the past 25 years. He has taught leadership to thousands of leaders in higher education, and has helped dozens of campuses conduct collaborative, transparent strategic planning processes.

He is the coauthor or author of five books, numerous articles, and several monographs in the fields of strategic planning, leadership, and change management. His most recent book, *Collaborative Leadership in Action*, was published in 2011, and his next book, *How to Actually Build an Exceptional Team*, will be published in the fall of 2012.

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Setting and Funding Priorities for Your Division: Making the Tough Decisions

SETTING PRIORITIES FOR YOUR DIVISION

Managing your division with excellence is going to require making very tough decisions. For example, perhaps you recognize the need to add an academic major in response to rising market demand. Yet your faculty and other resources are already operating at capacity, and you have limited funds for hiring additional faculty and limited space to allocate for the new courses. This scenario demands an honest and courageous look at whether your current resources are being invested in the best possible ways.

As Michael Porter, a professor in the Harvard Business School, contends, it's difficult to decide what to do and even more difficult to decide what not to do. But it's most difficult to decide what to stop doing.

Just adding revenue streams isn't enough. The public is increasingly skeptical as to whether colleges and universities use their resources in the most effective way. This will have a major impact on revenue growth in the coming years — be it from net tuition, fundraising, or state appropriations. I can't think of a more critical time for division heads to take a hard look at what to stop doing in order to free up resources.

Amit Mrig, President,
Academic Impressions

In this economic climate, there is a real danger in continuing to treat all units and all programmatic activities and services across a division as having equal weight and equal contribution to the institution's future. Establishing a credible and data-driven process for prioritizing (and, when necessary, de-prioritizing) work within your division is essential.

This process will be a powerful management tool for improving your division's performance and effectiveness — and will prove instrumental in generating much-needed trust and confidence, both internally and externally.

Bob Dickeson, former president of the University of Northern Colorado and author of *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services*, has developed a model for pursuing a priority-setting process at the institutional level, which can be easily adapted to operational planning at the division or college level.

The critical steps include:

- Establishing the right steering committee
- Gathering the data needed to make informed decisions
- Defining criteria for priority-setting
- Assigning weights to the various criteria
- Ranking your highest-priority activities

We interviewed Dickeson to learn how best to apply his model.

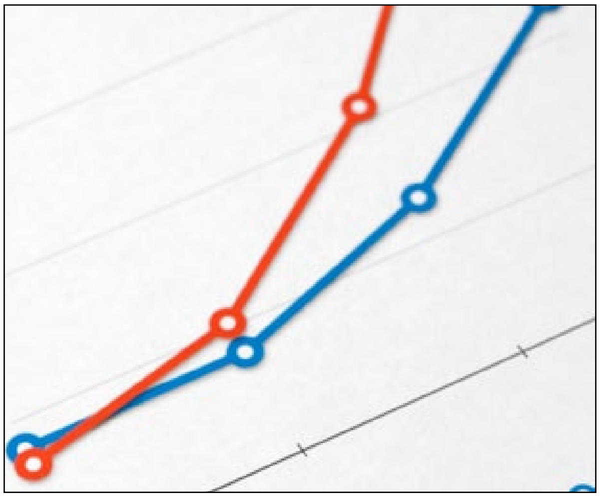
A PROCESS FOR UNDERTAKING PRIORITIZATION

In his book *Prioritizing Academic Programs and Services: Reallocating Resources to Achieve Strategic Balance* (**http://bit.ly/zc3k06**) (Jossey-Bass, 2nd ed; 2010), Dickeson outlines a process for pursuing prioritization efforts with direction, transparency, and rigor.

ESTABLISHING A CREDIBLE, DATA-DRIVEN PROCESS

To be credible, priority-setting for the division needs to be more than just a top-down process. "Prioritization is not about politics as usual," Dickeson cautions. "It is an extraordinary undertaking with the future at stake."

You will need to select a steering committee with broad representation from across your division. The key is to identify those individuals who are natural champions not of particular units but of the division and the institution as a whole.



“In the best cases,” Dickeson notes, “committee members see themselves as trustees of the institution, protecting its future, rather than as ‘delegates’ representing a single interest, department, or area, and thus protecting the past. I have actually seen the trustee-type member vote against his own program because he saw, in comparison with other programs and based on the data, that it was not worthy of his support.”

When you have the right steering committee, empower them to develop criteria for prioritization and to gather the data they’ll need to reach informed decisions.

Priority-setting is a data-based activity. It requires identifying where we excel, where we have opportunity to grow, where we need to cut back, and what programs or initiatives will be a good fit for us.

Bob Dickeson

It will be critical to identify the data you need most and take steps to obtain it. Reach out to your IR office, the registrar, and the bursar. Check Michael Middaugh’s national data.

“Start collecting what you can,” Dickeson advises, “and build your own database of meaningful information for your college or division. This will be a crucial management tool. You will be a lot more comfortable in your management role — especially when there are tough choices to be made — when you can back up your decisions with real data.”

DEFINING THE CRITERIA FOR PRIORITIZATION

The committee's critical task is to define the criteria by which they'll prioritize programs and activities across the division. "Institutions have sometimes used only three: size, cost, and quality," Dickeson observes. "However, I think a serious prioritization process, to be academically responsible, requires a more comprehensive analysis."

Dickeson recommends these 10 criteria for prioritizing academic programs:

- History, development, and expectations of the program
- External demand
- Internal demand
- Quality of inputs and processes
- Quality of outcomes
- Size, scope, and productivity
- Revenue and other resources generated by the program
- Costs and other expenses
- Impact, justification, and overall essentiality
- Opportunity analysis

And these 10 criteria for prioritizing administrative programs:

- Importance of the activity to the institution
- Key objectives and how they are measured
- Services provided, and to which customers — internal and external
- Position-by-position analysis
- Opportunities for collaboration, restructuring, and resource-sharing
- Opportunities for cross-training and leveraging of skill sets
- Process improvements to streamline operations
- Potential cost-effective technological improvements
- Outsourcing exploration to improve service and cut costs
- Opportunity analysis/unmet needs and demands

Dickeson's 10 suggested criteria can each be supported by data, and taken together, they represent a holistic look at the relevance and importance of a given program.

The key step will be to weight these criteria, with input from stakeholders throughout your division. While you will want to take many criteria into account, you'll need a clear decision on which factors ultimately will matter most in determining which activities across your division take priority.

MAKING THE TOUGH DECISIONS

"As departments and divisions contemplate adding new programs to their mix," Dickeson advises, "they should use the same criteria for prioritization, and tap the prioritization database to measure the efficacy of a proposed program." This ensures that you are adding the right new programs — and strengthens your case for allocating resources toward them.

Similarly, in a lean economy, your database empowers you to make staffing replacement decisions differently — based on data, not solely on historical decisions or on political factors. "Filling a vacant slot is a critical decision," Dickeson notes. "Rather than just fill slots, check where it makes sense to add a position and where it does not. Are you over-staffed in one area, while another area that is clearly performing at a superior level needs more staff? Are you filling vacancies and adding staff toward efforts that are aligned with your strategic priorities? Basing these decisions on data will give the division a leg up in competing for and justifying scarce resources."

> Tough decisions generate trust — they don't destroy it, because if you make the tough choices and you follow through, what you end up with is worthy of people's commitment and worthy of the institution's resources.
>
> **Amit Mrig, President, Academic Impressions**

Whether or not the institution as a whole conducts a program prioritization process, it makes sense to gather the data and undertake informed priority-setting for your division. This will mean more efficient use of your resources, improved performance and greater likelihood of meeting your division's goals, and an easily articulated rationale for the decisions you make and the priorities you've set.

DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN

Once you have defined the priorities for your division and have set some strategic objectives for the immediate future (e.g., the next three years), how do you turn those objectives into concrete action plans with a champion, timeline, and clear measures of success? Larry Goldstein, president of Campus Strategies, LLC, suggests the following process.

Gather a broadly representative group from your division and divide them into small groups, each of which will draft an action plan for one of the strategic priorities you've established. "The key is self-selection," Goldstein notes. "Don't assign someone to work on an action plan if they lack the enthusiasm and the interest. Otherwise, how strong can your action plan actually be?"

Following a template for action planning developed by Pat Sanaghan, president of The Sanaghan Group, Goldstein recommends having each of the groups outline:

- What is the overarching goal?
- What are three specific action steps or activities that will move us toward the goal?
- What is the timeline?
- What resources are needed?
- Who will champion and steward the effort?
- Who else needs to be involved?
- What will success look like, and how will we measure it?
- What pitfalls should we be aware of, going in?

If you manage a large division, Goldstein suggests assigning multiple groups to work on action plans for a given priority — you can then choose the best from among the suggestions made. If you manage a much smaller unit, consider devoting staff meetings to action planning. Perhaps you elect to devote each week for several weeks to one of the division's priorities, and in each of these weekly meetings, you work through the template together and decide how to operationalize that priority.

IDENTIFYING THREE ACTION STEPS

"The activities you commit to have to be very concrete," Goldstein cautions. "These are specific steps you can take that will move you closer to success. You need to be able to say easily that either you achieved or didn't achieve this step."

For example:

- We will conduct an RFP process to identify consultants in this arena.
- We will visit these three peer institutions to find out what they have done.
- We will conduct research to determine the best value for investment dollar among various technologies.

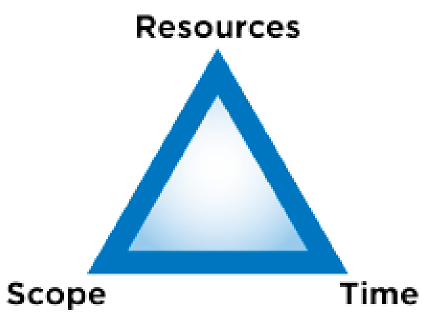
TIMELINE

Specificity is critical. You want to tie each of the action steps you've identified to a specific time. Identify appropriate phases for each activity. For example, for an RFP process, define timelines for conducting the initial research, issuing the RFP, and selecting the appropriate consultant or vendor.

IDENTIFYING THE RESOURCES NEEDED

Goldstein emphasizes the need to consider all the resources needed, not just budget dollars. Consider leadership attention, technology, and time. Staff hours are often the most critical resource — can you free up staff from doing X to allow them to devote themselves to Y? "This has to be addressed realistically up front," Goldstein warns. "You can't put together an action plan with pie-in-the-sky expectations about resources."

The key is to align resources, the scope of the plan (as expressed in the specific action steps you've proposed), and the anticipated timeline.



"If I know any two of these three — resources, scope, and time," Goldstein adds, "I can determine what the third will be. If these three are looked at separately, you have a big problem."

Have the tough conversations at the outset:

- If you know your division will be short on resources, do you need to extend your timeline?
- Are you committing to too much, given the resources available?
- If a shortened timeline is critical, do you need to find creative ways to increase the resources available? If you're short on staff, do you need to bring in outside expertise?

IDENTIFYING THE PEOPLE NEEDED

First, a given initiative will need a champion. Select this individual on the basis of their expertise and their affinity for the project, not their title. This is the individual who will steward the project, marshaling resources and people to move it forward. "This person needs to be in the room when selected and needs to be a vital part of that conversation," Goldstein notes. "You can have no champions by default."

> The champion is the one who takes it to heart that the success of the action plan is instrumental to their own success. Responsibility for these activities is not just another assignment; it comes with accountability.
>
> **Larry Goldstein, Campus Strategies, LLC**

When deciding who else to involve, Goldstein recommends setting narrow criteria. Those involved in the activity need to be there for a clear reason. Either they have special expertise they can apply to these activities, or it is part of their core responsibility to be involved, or, politically, it would be inappropriate not to involve them.

Identifying these key people at the outset — in the same conversation that identifies the action steps, the timeline, and the resources needed — will help you make sure not to miss anyone you do need, while avoiding too many cooks in the kitchen.

MEASURING THE PLAN'S SUCCESS

To set your division up for a successful implementation, decide on key measures of success from the outset. These measures need to be specific and quantifiable. For example, progress toward a goal of becoming a leader in the use of instructional technologies could be measured by the number of faculty engaged in adopting instructional technologies in their classes, the number of courses that have integrated instructional technologies, the GPA of the students in those classes, or any of a number of critical and measurable factors.

Is there a specific distinction that will let you know the goal has been reached? A specific score on a student satisfaction survey? Decide, in dialogue with key people across your department, what measures are truly important.

ANTICIPATING PITFALLS

Finally, engage in some realistic contingency planning. Goldstein recommends holding a "pre-mortem" planning activity to brainstorm what might go wrong, and what your division can put in place to mitigate these potential obstacles.

CONDUCTING A PRE-MORTEM

The pre-mortem is an activity developed by Pat Sanaghan to anticipate various issues that might arise that would stall implementation of your plan — and to create effective strategies for dealing with these anticipated challenges. You can learn more about the pre-mortem and other planning activities at Academic Impressions' upcoming **Integrated Resource Allocation and Strategic Planning conference**. The champion is the one who takes it to heart that the success of the action plan is instrumental to their own success. Responsibility for these activities is not just another assignment; it comes with accountability.

What if you are unable to secure the resources you need? What if a key person you need will be away on sabbatical and unavailable? "Don't assume you're going to get everything you need," Goldstein remarks. "Plan a cushion. Let's say that if everything goes perfectly, the initiative would take a six-month effort. Assume it won't go perfectly and allow yourself seven months."

Or consider obstacles that may arise related to buy-in. Perhaps your action plan calls for adoption of instructional technologies, and a pitfall that you can foresee is insufficient faculty participation. Can you invest time up front to identify all the benefits that would accrue to faculty who participate (increased student engagement, etc.) and build the case?

UPCOMING EVENTS

FREE WEBCAST: THE 10 DIFFERENTIATORS OF EXCEPTIONAL TEAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

APRIL 13, 2012 - 1:00 TO 2:00 PM EDT

FREE WEBCAST: SETTING AND IMPLEMENTING PRIORITIES – MAKING THE TOUGH DECISIONS

APRIL 16, 2012 - 1:00 TO 2:00 PM EDT

INTEGRATED STRATEGIC PLANNING AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION

JUNE 11 - 12, 2012 :: HOUSTON, TX

EMERGING LEADERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

JUNE 18 - 19, 2012 :: ATLANTA, GA

CREATING HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

JULY 16 - 17, 2012 :: ORLANDO, FL

INTEGRATED SUSTAINABILITY PLANNING INSTITUTE

JUNE 25 - 27, 2012 :: ATLANTA, GA

FUNDING YOUR ACTION PLAN

Consider this likely scenario. Your division has identified four strategic priorities that are of both high importance and high cost. But the institution is facing budget cuts, and you actually have less funding to work with this year than you did last year. How do you proceed?

Too often, the answer proposed is more fundraising. While fundraising and friend-raising will be critical to the success of your initiatives, devoting an increasing percentage of your time to raising donor dollars — if you are relying on this as your primary means of generating additional revenue — is not a sustainable solution.

You will need to find more creative ways to fund your division's action plan — either by cost-cutting, or by finding a way for your high-cost initiatives to generate revenue and become self-sustaining.

To help review an array of examples, we turned to Larry Goldstein, president of Campus Strategies, LLC, and Lucie Lapovsky, president of Lapovsky Consulting and past president of Mercy College.

REVENUE ENHANCEMENT: THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

KEY EXAMPLE: DREXEL UNIVERSITY

Looking at the high cost of adopting new technologies, Drexel University adopted an innovative and entrepreneurial approach. The university began providing back-office information technology services to smaller, more resource-constrained, local institutions, who found it more cost-effective to seek these services from Drexel than from another provider. In effect, the local institutions became clients of Drexel's IT unit, which had already invested in purchasing, deploying, and training in the new technologies.

Drexel University's win-win solution turned a potential cost center into a self-sustaining and revenue-generating enterprise — because they realized that the expertise they would develop in navigating the costs and complexities of deploying new technologies would itself be a marketable service.

If you are a dean on the academic side of the house, Lapovsky notes that a little creative thinking and a willingness to consider expanding the curriculum to new populations, new times and places, and new modalities can yield an array of possibilities for revenue enhancement:

- Can you increase enrollment from non-traditional students (e.g., working adults) by offering more courses on evenings and weekends?
- Can you expand your continuing education credit offerings in a way that is closely aligned with your college's mission (e.g., a college of education could offer weekend CE courses for current teachers at local schools)?
- Can you boost enrollment revenue by offering programs at an off-campus location?
- Can you partner with local high schools to offer courses locally at their facilities, or to expand early college enrollment?

Lapovsky cites the example of the University of Southern California's recent agreement with several for-profit providers to expand their online course offerings. In this arrangement, USC develops the curricula and course design, and outsources the marketing and faculty training to its partners, who take on the up-front costs of those efforts in return for a revenue share. Both parties benefit, and USC has been able to expand its offerings and its revenue with low financial risk.

Goldstein also recommends:

- Check to see if there is any central funding available from the institution. "Don't let your budget limit you in brainstorming about possible resources," he says. "In some cases, there may be resources that are not widely publicized but are available for efforts that are aligned with institutional priorities."
- Look not just for donors but for grants. "Look at FIPSE (**http://1.usa.gov/wKAV7h**)," Goldstein advises. "Look for foundations with an interest in what you're doing. So often, we think of grants only in terms of sponsored research, and forget to check for grants that would fund improvements."

We asked Goldstein how to encourage and solicit outside-the-box thinking:

When planning, open the door to more people so you get a broader range of ideas. Summarize the budgetary reality and then ask, "What else can we do?" Get all the ideas in the room, then think about which ones are worth pursuing. Don't worry right now about screening out the bad ideas. Let the bad ideas come in with the good, and find the nuggets.

Larry Goldstein, Campus Strategies, LLC

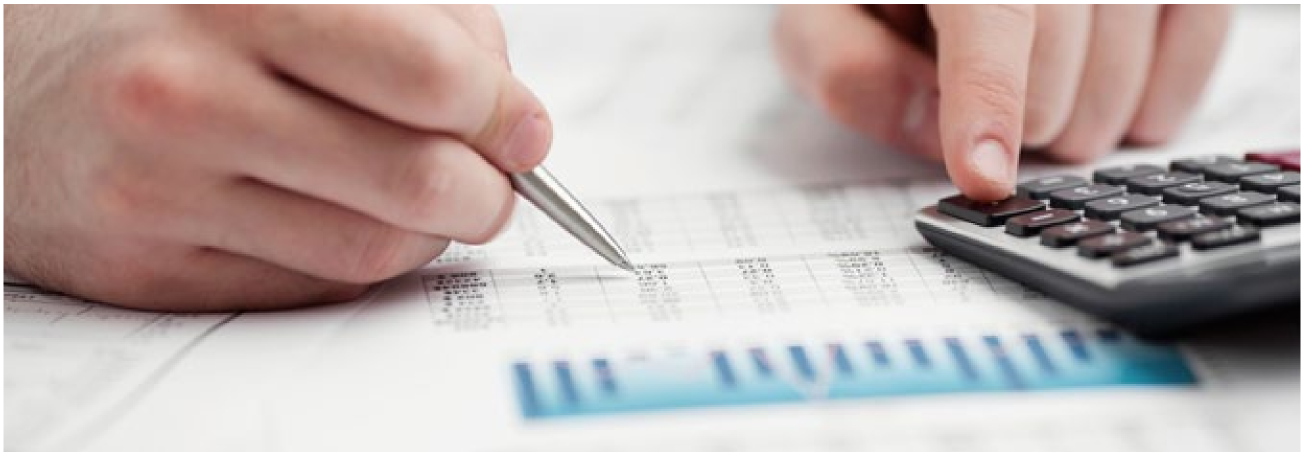
Goldstein recommends ensuring a broad mix of personnel in the room. Bring in clerical staff. Bring in students. “When looking for fresh opportunities, don’t just rely on the usual suspects.” Goldstein directs attention to a recent television spot by Domino’s Pizza (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-pRJczhkpM) that tells the story of how the company’s most recent big innovation came not from the extensive expertise of its R&D department but from the staff of a small pizza shop in Findlay, Ohio. You want a diversity in perspective; you can’t predict where the best ideas will come from.

COST-CUTTING AND EFFICIENCY

KEY EXAMPLE: UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

In one of the most memorable examples we’ve found of leveraging cost savings to fund needed investments, the facilities management division at the University of Wisconsin-Madison pioneered a project it dubbed CURB (Concentrated Upgrade and Repair of Buildings). CURB is an initiative to achieve long-term savings in facilities repair and renovation by using energy and water savings garnered through efficiency projects (most of which have seen a four- to five-year payback) to fund maintenance efforts.

Faramarz Vakili, UW-Madison’s associate director of the physical plant and the head of the project, recognized that energy savings represented a significant and untapped source of funding that could be leveraged to both carve into the deferred maintenance backlog and fund further sustainability efforts. Pursuing the project in manageable phases (by investing in energy efficiency upgrades for one facility at a time), he generated savings that could be used to tackle a longstanding and expensive campus problem. You can learn more about CURB in our article “Proactive Approaches to Deferred Maintenance” **(http://bit.ly/xuBb7E)**.



Besides identifying ways to generate new revenue, are there opportunities to improve efficiencies and trim costs, using the savings to fund high-priority activities? Lapovsky suggests both reviewing your administrative structure for any redundancies and auditing processes to find opportunities for automation.

One frequently missed opportunity, Lapovsky notes, is to automate the process by which advisors spend time walking through a checklist with students to ensure they have met their degree requirements. "The registrar is likely relying on software that audits this," Lapovsky remarks. "Give advisors access to it. Give students access to it — allow them to self-audit their degree requirements. Free up the labor and the time."

A CLOSE LOOK AT THE ACADEMIC SIDE OF THE HOUSE

If your division is within academic affairs:

- Review your course scheduling and its impact on course enrollments; if courses are scheduled according to when faculty most want to teach rather than when students most want to take courses, you may be scheduling in ways that don't maximize enrollment
- Audit release time and the reasons it's given — are there some instances in which faculty are granted release time for reasons that made sense 10 years ago but no longer do? (Lapovsky cites the example of release time granted for organizing holiday festivities.) At a larger college, an audit of release time could yield the equivalent of many full-time faculty
- Give thoughtful consideration to your mix of faculty — does it make sense for your institution to employ more part-time faculty? (determine whether or not this would allow you to add flexibility to your curriculum)
- Take a sophisticated look at faculty productivity and faculty workload; rather than measuring the number of courses per faculty member, look at the number of student credit hours generated; "if a number of faculty are generating lower credit hours," Lapovsky notes, "we could be teaching quite a few boutique courses. Do we need so many? Can we collaborate with another institution to offer some of them to both our students, so that we have fewer under-enrolled courses?"

Partnerships or consortia to provide courses represent an often under-utilized resource. Offering one additional example, Lapovsky suggests the potential uses of OpenCourseWare, MITx, or Carnegie Mellon Online to free up some faculty time for new priorities by investigating open courseware. Are there areas in your curriculum where it would be appropriate to use open courses and then add a discussion section with weekly meetings, an exam, or a learning portfolio — rather than offering another full course?

This approach allows you to invest one of your institution's most valuable assets — the unique expertise of your unique faculty — toward those prioritized efforts that truly differentiate your institution. Whether you are looking to a partner company to provide marketing services (as the University of Southern California did) or looking to a partner institution to provide certain courses, in either case the question is: Are our division's limited faculty and staff hours being expended in ways that best meet our students' needs, best serve our top priorities, and allow us to move us forward into the future?

STRATEGIES TO ENSURE IMPLEMENTATION

Beginnings are critical, and operational plans often lose momentum in their first year of implementation. This "first-year dilemma" emerges when expectations around timeline and phasing haven't been right-sized.

Consider these two scenarios:

- The student affairs division at Institution A has over-committed its staff and its limited resources, committing to too many action steps in the first year. In a surge of enthusiasm for moving the division into the future, the champions of the action plan have committed to do 80 percent of the work in the first year. The teams involved are stretched too thin and are losing momentum.
- The college of education at Institution B has the opposite problem: it's become bogged down in the research and data gathering, and is seeing few tangible results in the first year. The college is still "planning to plan."

Let's look at both what could have been done at the outset to avoid these two scenarios, and also at what can be done now, in the midst of the year, to diagnose the issue and address it. We asked for the advice of Pat Sanaghan, president of The Sanaghan Group. Here are the steps he recommends.

RIGHTSIZING EXPECTATIONS AT THE OUTSET

Sanaghan recommends naming these two manifestations of the first-year dilemma up front, and holding deliberate conversations about them. "The division's leadership needs to be honest and direct about the ways in which implementation might break down, and set guiding principles for moving forward, for striking the right balance. Staff will look to the leaders to set the pace and the right expectations."

Sanaghan also notes that seeking feedback on the written plan can help to catch costly errors in thinking or unrealistic expectations early. This will mean:

- Seeking anonymous feedback from unit heads and staff throughout your department
- Seeking collegial feedback from your peers leading other divisions across the campus

Ask for feedback on the proposed timeline and resourcing of the division's objectives. Ask if the plan presents both an aggressive and a realistic set of actions to take. Do the words "research" and "analysis" appear in every other paragraph? Does the plan identify definite "low-hanging fruit" that can be achieved in the first year?

"This sounds almost obvious," Sanaghan comments, "but it is alarming how often the step of seeking adequate feedback on the plan is skipped, in the rush to implement. You need the feedback to rightsize your thinking."

CHECKING IN DURING THE YEAR

What about after the plan is green-lighted? "Pay attention and pay attention often," Sanaghan remarks. He suggests establishing a division or departmental scorecard that tracks the four or five measures that are the best determinants of the plan's success. Such a scorecard can serve as both a reality check and as a key discussion-starter both for monthly team or departmental check-ins, and for supervisory dialogue during individual performance evaluation.

"You don't want the scorecard to be reductive," Sanaghan cautions, "but you need to identify the four or five essential factors that show success. You've set priorities and developed an action plan to carry them out — how will you know this has been done? Measure what matters, and when one of those measures drops, respond quickly."

Sanaghan recommends meeting monthly to review progress toward the goals. The frequency is critical; you want to avoid the opposing dangers of overwhelming staff with weekly meetings, or meeting so infrequently that work toward strategic priorities and new initiatives gets buried beneath the pressure of daily tasks. Use monthly meetings to diagnose slow progress or overcommitment prior to halfway through the first year.

Monthly check-ins, if deliberate and structured, can achieve several purposes:

- Ensure there are public opportunities to celebrate real successes
- Provide occasions for problem-solving and division-wide brainstorming to address obstacles as they arise (Do we need more people? Do we need to outsource an effort? Did we commit too much and need to scale back?)
- Most of all, these check-ins show the division that its leadership is paying attention

> That is the real key to implementation. Leaders have to model and convey the importance of the action plan. And it's not enough just to meet regularly with a few department heads; you have to communicate to all the staff that these conversations are happening. Make sure everyone knows that the division is pursuing implementation in a disciplined way. People will invest in the plan if they see their leaders invested in it.
>
> **Pat Sanaghan, The Sanaghan Group**

BUILDING TRUST

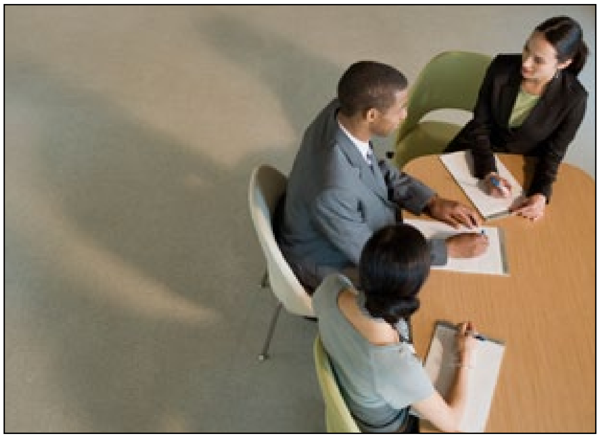
All of this presupposes that leaders are inviting open dialogue and are taking active steps to set a tone for conversations about progress that builds trust and clarifies expectations. A distrustful environment will preclude open sharing of honest information about progress, and will leave staff reticent to ask for help. It's crucial that leaders model the types of conversation needed. To do so, they will need to:

- Consistently invite an honest appraisal of progress
- Convey a willingness to re-prioritize and re-assess the plan as the environment changes
- Communicate that this is not merely the implementation of a static plan but a learning process
- Hold staff accountable while ensuring (and communicating) that no one will be punished for mistakes, as long as we learn from them

ENSURING INDIVIDUAL ACCOUNTABILITY

Besides regularly checking to see if the division is on track with its scorecard (and brainstorming what to do if it isn't), make sure that team and individual performance evaluation is aligned with the four or five key measures identified on that scorecard.

Prioritization of the department's key commitments will falter in implementation if there is no mechanism in place to ensure individual accountability for those commitments. You need to be able to hold your staff accountable when execution is slow or failing, as well as have a clear basis for offering recognition and reward when there has been definite progress.



ALIGNING PERFORMANCE METRICS WITH STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Our recent edition of Higher Ed Impact: Monthly Diagnostic, "Deploying Intentional Staff Performance Metrics in Higher Education," (**http://bit.ly/xH6CWS**) offers strategies for ensuring that staff metrics and supervision are tied to progress toward your division's goals.