



CATEGORY 8

PLANNING CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

8C1 A Vision of the Future

Over the next ten years Southwestern College will continue the process of transforming itself from a small residential college for students of traditional age into a comprehensive college offering undergraduate and graduate degrees to learners of all ages engaged in part-time and full-time study in both residential and non-residential (including distance education) learning environments. Consequently, enrollment will increase from its current level of 1,700 students to a new level of 3,000 students. Elaboration of this vision is provided in the Statement of Goals and Directions, which is the result of continuous strategic planning, outlining the ten-year goals and the three-year plans. This booklet is included as Appendix A.

8C2 Aligning Strategies With Vision

The strategic plan contains ten-year goals that attempt to paint a picture of what Southwestern aspires to become in ten years. The three-year directions and one-year steps are designed to focus and prioritize the college's efforts to obtain its goals. The goals, directions, and steps flow from the vision statement and mission of the college (Appendix A).

8P1 Planning Process Timeline

Both the ten-year goals and the three-year plans are continuously monitored. Every year the Board of Trustees reviews and approves revised three-year directions and steps. Every three years they review and approve the institution's ten-year goals. The current timeline:

- April 2007: Trustees reaffirmed the goals and approved the updated directions;
- January 2008: Trustees review directions to be acted upon April 2008;
- April – September 2008: College-wide SWOT analysis conducted;
- January 2009: Trustees will review draft goals and directions;
- April 2009: Trustees will act on directions, goals, and celebrate accomplishments of 2006-2009.

8P2 Selecting Appropriate Goals and Strategies

Ten-year goals are discussed, chosen, and drafted by a Task Force on the Future of Southwestern College which is appointed by the president every three years. This group is made up of trustees, administrators, and faculty. The trustees approve the ten-year goals every three years. Every year the Planning Council works with the three-year directions and steps to provide a status report and recommendations to the trustees. The length of time a strategy takes depends in a wide variety of issues such as funding, personnel, and policies.



8P3 Developing Implementation Assignments

Using the Statement of Goals and Directions, the college's Administrative Council develops one- and two-year implementation assignments (see Appendix I) that are executed to achieve the college's strategies. These implementation assignments, for which vice presidents and the president are responsible, guide the work of the college's employees.

8P4 Aligning Planning With Action

All employees are made aware of both the strategic plan and its implementation assignments through interaction with their supervisors. Faculty, administrative, and staff job descriptions and performance evaluations help to align needs for resources, training, and workloads with institutional action plans and outcomes. The college has completed training in 2007 for supervisors designed to strengthen links between performance evaluations, departmental plans, and institutional goals and objectives.

8P5 Setting Performance Expectations

Work areas, departments, and programs assigned responsibility for various outcomes within the college select the assessment tools that best provide the feedback and data they need. Performance expectations flow from the expectations set in the strategic plan. Each process requires yearly measurable targets.

The college is learning to measure and is not particularly adept at measurement. Most measures are macro- or enterprise-level measures. We have few process measures or intermediate level measures.

8P6 Allocating Appropriate Resources

Because the college is heavily dependent on tuition, our ability to allocate support for college programs is also dependent upon enrollment outcomes and, to a much lesser extent, the ability to attract charitable gifts. The college's enrollment projection process drives the development of the institutional budget. The institutional budget then defines what is possible in terms of implementing action plans.

Areas responsible for implementation of strategies and action plans work within the budgeting and personnel process to secure the resources needed for implementation. The Finance Committee sets area budgets with division chairs and department heads making allocations within their area (see organizational chart in Appendix F).



8P7 Developing Human Resources to Meet Goals

Supervisors work through performance expectations and evaluations and are encouraged to look for gaps in the capacity of the employees. Remedies may include training sessions and educational opportunities. On the main campus, the Faculty Development Committee oversees a process for faculty development and nurture. (One area for improvement is with main campus adjunct instructors.) Supervisors have significant discretion regarding the expenditure of their budgets and are encouraged to evaluate the needs of their staffs for training, professional development, etc. Professional Studies faculty development sessions are held throughout the year to provide appropriate training for faculty.

8P8 Measuring Continuous Improvement

For the past three years the college has used the Baldrige “Are We Making Progress?” survey to gather facts and opinion from the college’s employees. The survey contains information about strategic planning, measurement and analysis, and process management. The compiled results of these surveys have shown only gradual changes, but the surveys have driven points of emphasis in the college’s improvement efforts. The recently completed training for supervisors was undertaken in response to survey findings indicating that many employees did not understand how the college’s plans affected them and their work and did not know how to tell if they are making progress on the part of the plan for which they or their department are responsible. That measure should improve as we continue to work to make the college’s planning and improvement processes more visible and meaningful for employees. Results of the employee surveys can be found in the attached document.

The college’s vice president for enrollment management and planning is responsible for tracking the college’s success in completing directions and steps annually.

The college’s president tracks the Administrative Council’s success in completing implementation assignments annually.

8R1 Results of Goal Completion Measurements

About 75% of three-year goals are completed. About 80% of implementation assignments are completed.

8R2 Projecting Goal Completion

We project that as we set timelines for completion with greater specificity, our completion rates will increase by five percentage points over the next three years. We would rather set “stretch” goals and miss a few than have perfect completion on modest goals.

8R3 Comparing Goal Completion to Other Institutions

While benchmarking on specific issues occurs throughout the college, development of a comparison of our planning process with others has not been undertaken.



8R4 Standards for Effectiveness

Effectiveness has been viewed primarily in the institution's ability to accomplish the goals, directions, and steps in the plan and weigh these with the major indicators of the health of the institutions, i.e. enrollment, retention, and fundraising.

Progress made under the planning process that began in 2000 is posted in the Points of Progress document that appears in Appendix H.

8I1 Standards for Continuous Improvement

The Planning Council, the Task Force on the Future of Southwestern College, and the Administrative Council review our improvement processes. Work on our first round of AQIP action projects has focused attention on improvement. Completion of this Systems Portfolio will yield a list of questions poorly answered or not addressed. This list will drive focused improvement in our planning processes.