

# PLANNING

for higher  
education

## BOOK EXCERPT

## Components of a Strategic Plan

### Align Institutional Mission, Vision, and Values through the Strategic Planning Process

by Karen E. Hinton, PhD

Each element of a strategic plan serves a purpose. But what are those purposes? And how do the elements connect?

The following article is taken from SCUP's recently released Second Edition of [\*A Practical Guide to Strategic Planning in Higher Education\*](#). This excerpt from Section Two provides definitions of three basic components of a contemporary strategic plan and explains how they are used to create the foundation for a comprehensive institutional strategic planning process.

Contemporary strategic plans have multiple components and each serves a specific purpose. These components are planning tools used either separately or in groups, but their development is usually, of necessity, a linear progression. One of the purposes of the planning process is to ensure these individual components are aligned with each other and mutually supportive.

While not technically a part of the strategic plan, the mission statement is the foundation for it. Everything contained in the strategic plan must be aligned with the mission. In addition to the mission statement, a vision statement, institutional goals, and an optional values statement comprise the supporting documents establishing the context for a strategic plan. These supporting documents provide specific points of



guidance in the planning process. The vision statement is the expression of institution aspiration and based on analysis of the institution's environment. Institutional goals provide the mechanism for evaluating progress toward the vision, and values statements describe the manner in which the institution will work to achieve its goals.

<b>FOUNDATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Mission Statement</li> </ul>
<b>SUPPORTING COMPONENTS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Values</li> <li>♦ Institutional Goals</li> <li>♦ Vision</li> </ul>
<b>STRATEGIC PLAN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Goals and Objectives</li> <li>♦ Implementation Plan</li> </ul>

## Institutional Mission

The foundation of any strategic plan is the institutional mission statement. This statement delineates, in concise language, why the institution exists and what its operations are intended to achieve. For publicly controlled institutions, this statement of purpose may be dictated by the state, but for all institutions the statement serves as the explanation for the existence of the organization.

Historically, mission statements were long, exhaustively detailed descriptions of the institution's founding, curricular history, unique culture, and current services. The mission statement also often included an explanation of what the institution stood for and what it intended its students to become. An interested student of strategic planning can open any

archived college catalog to find, within the first few pages, a mission statement at least a full page long containing all the historic information about the institution anyone would care to know. These types of mission statements have been termed "comprehensive mission statements" because they tend to include everything anyone thought might be important to know about the institution.

With the advent of contemporary planning methods, however, the comprehensive mission statement became a limiting factor in the planning process. Two major problems were created by trying to develop a strategic plan based on a comprehensive mission statement. First, it could be difficult to sift through the verbiage to isolate and identify specifically those elements of the statement everyone agreed identified the foundation for all activities. This identification was critical because the accrediting commissions had formed an evaluation standard to examine how well all operations aligned with the mission.

Comprehensive missions, as a result of their breadth, provided ample opportunity for wide interpretation, a condition called "mission creep." Institutions found themselves having to justify community outreach or academic programs that extended the activities of the institution beyond its actual mission. From the perspective of the accrediting commission, a situation where the institution was using resources for activities beyond the scope of its mission indicated the institution might not be using its resources as effectively as possible. This definition of "institutional effectiveness" meant accrediting commissions were looking for a direct relationship between how the institution used its resources and what the mission



statement outlined as the reason the institution existed.

The second limitation of comprehensive mission statements was that most of them were rife with language about institutional culture and values. While critical to revealing how the institution differed from others with similar characteristics, the effect of these statements was to virtually require the institution to evaluate and assess them as part of institutional effectiveness. With all the other aspects of assessment academe needed to oversee, developing measurements for values was perhaps not the most critical priority.

As a result of these very real limitations, more recent planning practice limits the mission to its primary function. The mission statement is stripped down to a very short, basic statement of purpose. If the institution believes it also needs to provide a separate set of institutional goals, they can be appended to the shorter mission statement in a subsection or displayed in conjunction with the mission statement. The mission statement then can be a clear, concise statement: “This is what we are here to do.”

## Institutional Values

Values have been removed from the mission to a separate values statement component. In this new setting, they explain what the institution stands for and the way in which it intends to conduct its activities. In some cases, these values are so important the institution has programs and assessment measures to support and sustain them as key elements. But regardless of their priority, within the context of

planning and evaluation, the values statement should declare: “These are the characteristics we believe are important in how we do our work.”

## Institutional Vision Statement

The institutional vision statement is one of the most important components of a strategic plan. The vision statement is an institution’s clear description of what it intends *to become* within a certain timeframe. The vision statement defines the institution’s strategic position in the future and the specific elements of that position with relationship to the mission statement. In some cases, the vision is that of one leader at the campus. Often this leader is the president, but the vision can sometimes come from an academic vice president or provost. Usually, however, the vision is reviewed and revised by members of the campus community, especially the strategic planning committee.

Vision statements benefit the planning process by providing everyone in the institution with the same vision of the future. If the purpose of the planning process is to align mission, vision, goals, and resources, it is critical to ensure those who will be called on to implement the strategic plan are all “pulling in the same direction.” This is especially true if the vision statement is really a reflection of one person’s vision for the institution’s future. In this case, it is in the best interests of the institution to provide stakeholders with an opportunity to “own” the vision, either through review and revision of the statement or some form of early input into the statement draft.



The mission and vision statements provide the two ends of an analytical view of the institution from which the strategic plan is developed. The mission and vision represent the current and envisioned state of the institution. The strategic plan is used to bridge the gap between the two.

It is regularly assumed by members of the campus community that a vision statement can only be produced if market research has been conducted to determine what educational needs are not being met by peer and aspirational institutions. This perception is only partially true. In fact, market research is more effective if it is conducted after the vision statement has been written and approved. What is

needed to complete a strategic plan is, more often, an environmental scan.

While market research provides detailed data and projections of the current external environment, the aim of an environmental scan is to help planners develop a unified view of the future and identify the resources necessary to move forward. A good environmental scan is general in nature, includes both internal and external environments, and provides planners with a common understanding of trends and issues for the future. The scan is used to inform the organization's vision and identify the broad strategic objectives that will become a guideline for an action plan.

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## Author Biography



KAREN E. HINTON, PHD, has a career spanning more than 25 years in planning and administration in higher education, filling leadership positions at large and small public and private colleges and universities, community colleges, and university system offices. She developed, facilitated, and managed numerous strategic plans, accreditation self-studies, and process improvement initiatives in a wide range of situations as a senior member of staff and also as a consultant. Hinton is the author of the first and updated second edition of *A Practical Guide to Strategic Planning in Higher Education*.

### Engage with the Author

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Society for College and University Planning  
**www.scup.org** | © 2022 by the Society for College and  
University Planning | All rights reserved. Published  
2022. | ISSN 0736-0983

Indexed in the Current Index to Journals in Education  
(ERIC), Higher Education Abstracts, and Contents  
Pages in Education. Also available from ProQuest  
Information and Learning, 789 E. Eisenhower Parkway,  
P.O. Box 1346, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48108.

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