CHAPTER 3

INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

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GOAL 2: INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

(Ramapo College Strategic Plan, p. 9)

The College will strive to increase and diversify its revenues to provide the human and material resources needed to deliver high-quality programs and services.

- Objective 2.5: The College will enhance effectiveness and efficiency by integrating institutional planning, budget development, management, and assessment.

STANDARD 7: INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT

The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards.

THE CONTEXT

The strategic planning process has facilitated a culture of assessment at Ramapo College. The college monitors institutional effectiveness through a regular process of planning and outcomes assessment. The goal is to produce continuous improvement and to provide evidence that the college is achieving its mission.

The institutional effectiveness process at the college is a continuous cycle of planning, implementing, and improving applied at every level of the institution. An institutional effectiveness plan provides answers to the following recurring questions:

- Who are we?
- What are we trying to accomplish?
- How well are we doing?
- How can we improve what we are doing?
- What evidence exists that we have improved?

PROCESS AND PLAN

In fall 2001, President Smith initiated a strategic planning exercise. He charged thirteen task forces and special ad hoc committees with conducting a broad-based institutional analysis of all academic, administrative, and support units. Input from a presidential Blue Ribbon Commission made the broad-based institutional analysis more complete. The Blue Ribbon Commission reviewed all administrative personnel issues and all non-academic, non-student-intensive programs and services that were not cost-effective (Chandler Commission Report, 2002, available on the visiting team Web site). An overall analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats strengthened the process. Information gathered from the Blue Ribbon Commission, the overall analysis, the task forces, and the special ad-hoc committees created the foundation for a broad institutional agenda. At a retreat in
June 2002, the Board of Trustees and senior leadership fashioned that agenda into the 2002-2012 Ramapo College Strategic Plan, titled Enhancing Institutional Excellence. The strategic plan reflected the work of a diverse array of stakeholders from throughout the campus who participated on the task forces, committees, commissions, and retreats.

*Enhancing Institutional Excellence* presented a ten-year road map with goals, objectives, action steps, and funding sources for each proposed initiative or program. The strategic plan also called for annual reviews and revisions at five-year intervals. In October 2005, the college completed its first inventory of progress toward accomplishing the objectives of the strategic plan. After three years, the college had completed 50% (139 of 277) of the prescribed action steps.

The arrival of President Mercer in 2005 presented a timely opportunity to improve the strategic planning process and to reconsider the plan’s goals and objectives. The revised plan could correct shortcomings and address new challenges, as follows:

- The twenty-two long-range goals were listed in no order of priority and had proven difficult to communicate, monitor, and assess.
- While the original plan called for annual evaluations, the first evaluation did not take place until three years after the plan was enacted.
- The economic environment had changed dramatically, forcing new reviews, timelines, and processes for setting and integrating priorities.

For this planning exercise, the college convened a Strategic Planning Task Force that began meeting in November 2006. Chaired by the president, the task force included representatives from on and off campus who met in small working groups. The task force produced a very different document for a very different time—one that enables the college to focus its efforts in a planned, integrated, and measurable way. The revised strategic plan was guided by six principles that are the basic assumptions underlying the plan’s goals (*Ramapo College Strategic Plan*, p. 7).

Integral to the strategic plan is the college vision statement:

> “Ramapo College aspires to be the premier public college in the greater New Jersey/New York metropolitan area providing a high quality education across programs whose curricula are founded on a commitment to the liberal arts”. (p. 5)

The availability of funding greatly affects the ability to pursue strategic objectives (the range of outcomes to achieve the goals). With traditional sources unlikely to yield “extra funds” to pursue strategic initiatives, the college recognized the need to seek additional revenue sources and to free up funds by reallocating portions of the operating budget.

With a vision that was informed by campus constituents, the college took two important steps: It created a dedicated fund for strategic priorities and embarked on an initiative to link planning, budgeting, and assessment with the goals and objectives in the strategic plan. While Ramapo had previously reviewed efficiencies and effectiveness at the unit level, evidence tended to be anecdotal. This new initiative required a formal institutional structure that would integrate planning, budgeting, and assessment (see Figure 1).

Purposeful integration of planning, budgeting, and assessment is a hallmark of the strategic plan. In September 2008, the college put into action an integrated process for these functions. The “newness” of the process presented challenges that are expected to diminish over time. All divisions have submitted plans that show alignment with the three strategic goals, and information made available during all levels of planning, budgeting, and assessment drives the continuous process forward (sample unit plans in the Appendix).
The planning, budgeting, and assessment process encompasses three levels of planning:

- Level I: Strategic planning, which occurs in three- to five-year cycles
- Level II: Tactical planning, which follows a three-year cycle
- Level III: Operational planning, which takes place annually.

The process produces several types of output: annual operational plans, short- and long-term plans, and strategic initiatives. Human and fiscal resources plans are integrated into divisional plans.

**FIGURE 1**
**PLANNING, BUDGET, AND ASSESSMENT PROCESS**

**Source:** Chief Planning Officer
The Institutional Effectiveness Committee is an important link in the planning, budgeting, and assessment process. The committee systematically assesses the goals and objectives of non-academic programs. Each unit director develops a three-year rolling plan that outlines the goals and objectives for the coming years as well as requests for additional funding to achieve those desired outcomes. A series of online forms assist unit directors with their submissions.

Requests must be tempered with an appreciation for two distinct realities: first, resources are finite, with restoration of state appropriations unlikely; and second, the college cannot be everything to everyone. Unit requests must draw specific parallels showing how their requests will enhance the three college goals of academic excellence: investing in the future, and enriching college life and community presence. Requests must be specific about desired outcomes and how achievement of those goals will be measured.

Recognizing that funding requests far outnumbered available resources, the chief planning officer in 2008 charged the Institutional Effectiveness Committee with awarding strategic funding to mission-critical requests most likely to achieve strategic objectives. The committee uses four financial ratios to gauge the affordability of strategic objectives and the amount of funds that can be allocated to achieve them.

The funding for strategic initiatives comes from a dedicated account. The college deploys 2% of its annual operating budget to pay for those initiatives that further the college’s mission, goals, and objectives as outlined in the strategic plan. This Strategic Priority Incentive Funding (SPIF) ensures that strategic initiatives continue to move forward. Once the Institutional Effectiveness Committee determines the affordability of strategic objectives, it prioritizes funding requests using Resource Allocation Mapping Process developed by KPMG and Prager, Sealy & Co. LLC (see Figure 2).

Individual unit plans, survey data, and benchmark comparisons inform the mapping criteria. Funding is contingent upon the ability of unit administrators to quantify their success in relation to tactical, operational, and ultimately strategic plans. The mapping matrix provides the decision-making framework to determine which programs and functions are not mission-critical. This allows resources to be redirected to mission-critical objectives. The matrix reduces subjectivity in the process by establishing criteria for levels of strategic relevance.

**FIGURE 2**
**MAPPING MATRIX**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE</th>
<th>Q3 Important</th>
<th>Q1 Critical Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q4 Less Important</td>
<td>Q2 Very Important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MARKET TRENDS</th>
<th>S3 Important</th>
<th>S1 Critical Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S4 Less Important</td>
<td>S2 Very Important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MISSION</th>
<th>INTERNAL COMPETENCIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Each year units reassess their rolling plans and evaluate the progress toward articulated goals. Continued investment is assessed based on data from student surveys, employee questionnaires, national benchmarks, etc. Funding may be shifted depending upon strategic progress and competing priorities. Unit directors must assess their own budgets and objectives, determine which will best align with college-wide objectives, and redistribute funds to meet their unit needs.
The Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Planning tracks achievements for administrative units, while the Office of the Provost tracks progress—including achievement of student learning outcomes—for all academic units. The committees listed below, working under the umbrella of Institutional Effectiveness, monitor institutional resource allocation in relation to the achievement of mission and strategic goals. The committees strive to make their work transparent and to make sure information is easily disseminated within and across groups.

BUDGET COMMITTEE

The college’s budget development and planning process helps the college manage resources efficiently; maintain fiscal control; improve services and processes; and allocate resources effectively. The Budget Committee meets regularly to discuss the financial health of the institution and to make decisions based on a specific set of budget principles (Principles of Budget Development in the Appendix).

POSITION REVIEW COMMITTEE

The Position Review Committee meets weekly to review requests for new and replacement positions, including agency temps; grant-funded positions; upgrades and reclassifications; and bona fide offers of employment. The committee conducts a thorough analysis of current and future staff positions to facilitate institutional staffing decisions based on qualitative and quantitative data. The committee reviews each request within the context of the entire college. In its deliberations the committee weighs fiscal considerations and the reallocation of resources to fund strategic priorities.

SPACE ALLOCATION COMMITTEE

The Space Allocation Committee establishes procedures to allocate space; maintains an up-to-date space inventory that identifies what space is used and for what purpose; and fulfills space requests. After reviewing space requests based on specific criteria, the committee makes final recommendations to the President’s Cabinet. The cabinet reviews requests based on a specific set of principles (Space Allocation Criteria in the Appendix).

CHANGING CULTURE: ACCOMPLISHMENT AND CHALLENGES

The planning process for Ramapo College is fully operational. A significant benefit of the process is the ability to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats based on information gathered from students, other stakeholders, and internal and external scans. This organizational knowledge provides support for the key themes arising out of Ramapo’s vision, mission, goals, and objectives. The themes and various analyses form the basis for developing strategic priorities.

Based on the outcomes of planning at Level I planning, the strategic priorities and themes form the basis for divisional plans created at Level II. These include the academic plan, the financial plan, the human resources plan, the communication/marketing plan, the information technology plan, the enrollment management plan, the diversity plan, and the facilities/master plan. Divisional plans form the broad agenda for the academic school plans and individual unit plans.

Annual budgeting flows from the school and individual unit plans and feeds back to the divisional plans. Deans and unit managers translate short and long-term plans aligned with the strategic priorities, mission, and vision into action plans.

This continuous process allows for flexibility in planning and budgeting. Education and training for stakeholders, as well as transparent decision-making, are critical for ensuring the integrity of the process. By aligning funding decisions with strategic priorities, the college can ensure that resources will be available to execute the strategic plan.
The success of the planning process requires the active engagement of all stakeholders. The effort reached a significant milestone in September 2008 when units submitted annual reports and three-year plans. The level of engagement deepened as the community submitted questions and recommendations to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness. For example, stakeholders requested more detailed information, less cumbersome software, and a better schedule to make the timing of submissions and approvals less awkward. A new Web site devoted to Strategic Priority Incentive Fund requests increased transparency, enhanced the integrity of the process, and encouraged further engagement by stakeholders. The Institutional Effectiveness Web site was improved after unit directors and division heads described the challenges of accessing information.

As the process matures, the goal will be to make user-friendly information available to all stakeholders in real time. The college is proud to be ahead of the curve in its planning, budgeting, and assessment process. It is the first public college in New Jersey to use the KPMG mapping methodology to enhance institutional effectiveness.

The college continually takes steps to improve the transparency and integrity of the evaluation and allocation process. The Web site of the Office of Institutional Effectiveness allows the campus to view the requests that were submitted and their relationship to the goals of the strategic plan. Additionally, to ensure integrity, the institutional effectiveness mapping process is designed to limit the subjectivity involved in resource allocation. The Institutional Effectiveness Committee also analyzes indicators, such as market trends and financial returns. This makes the assessment process more dynamic as the committee identifies:

- Areas where programs should be re-evaluated in light of Ramapo’s mission;
- Programs that should develop exit strategies so that funding can be shifted to more mission-critical programs;
- Opportunities for potential growth in programs; and
- New initiatives that align with the college’s mission and strategic vision.

Inherent in this process is the Institutional Effectiveness Committee’s power to prioritize all strategic requests. The Committee can allocate the finite resources it has based on the outcomes of the mapping process. The three-year rolling plans encourage each unit to critically analyze itself and to evaluate unit activities based on outcomes.

This new institutional process marks a significant change from past practice. With the new process for allocating resources, administrative roles and responsibilities are inherently defined by the college’s strategic goals. Unit directors and faculty are now directly involved in developing outcomes assessments. The process of aligning funding requests to strategic goals reinforces the institution’s commitment to making those goals a reality. The Strategic Priority Incentive Fund allocations for Fiscal Year 2010 are as follows (see Figure 3):

**FIGURE 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>Number of Requests Funded</th>
<th>Percentage of Overall Funds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic Affairs</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Advancement</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Affairs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration &amp; Finance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Institutional Effectiveness Meeting Documents, Feb. 4, 2009*
The college has already benefited greatly from this process. In the course of prioritizing initiatives, stakeholders had to determine what was most important to the institution, thereby helping to define and refine the college’s collective mission.

Creating a culture that embraces the planning, budgeting, and assessment process has its challenges. These include ensuring continual funding and the successful reallocation of existing money; protecting the integrity of the process from social and political influences; and providing support and training to all stakeholders to ensure an equitable platform for decision-making. Overall, the biggest challenge continues to be refining the process so that it can be more smoothly integrated into the operation of the college.

OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT

A broad range of organizational knowledge supports the strategic planning process. Outcomes assessment, for example, at the division and unit levels feeds back to institutional planning and budgeting (see Figure 4).

FIGURE 4

| Examples of Organizational Knowledge that Support the Strategic Planning Process |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| **Internal Analysis**           | Administrative, employee, capital information                                   |
| **External Analysis**           | Demographic information, regulatory information, market analysis, economic and employment trends, competitive data, faculty salaries, employee salaries, number of employees at the college, expenditures |
| **Academic Outcomes**           | National survey of student engagement, graduating senior survey, alumni survey, freshmen survey, accreditation results, evaluation of freshman orientation, evaluation of First-Year Experience, student evaluation of instructor/course |
| **Financial Plan**              | Expenditures, capital expenses, budget expenses, strategic expenses, compliance expenses, financial ratios |
| **Human Resources Plan**        | Faculty achievements and scholarship, training needs assessment, survey of employee opinion concerning retirement and retirement incentives, 360-degree supervisor evaluation survey, Psychologically Healthy Workplace Award, employee questionnaire |
| **Communication Marketing Plan**| In progress                                                                       |
| **Information Technology Plan** | Help Desk reports, classroom utilization reports, lab utilization reports, resource management reports, faculty evaluation of course management system, student evaluation of course management system |
| **Enrollment Management Plan**  | Enrollment management reports, demographic data, graduation rates, SAT scores, ethnicity, age, residence/non-residence, ACUHO-I/EBI Resident Study |
| **Diversity Plan**              | Campus Climate Survey                                                             |
| **Facilities/Master Plan**      | Facilities audit and assessments, Capital Projects Report                          |
| **Schools**                     | Annual reports                                                                    |
| **Majors**                      | Retention rates, grades, GPA, assessment results, graduation rates                 |
| **Administrative Units/Departments** | Annual reports, unit plans, program assessments                                      |
For comparative and competitive information, Ramapo College benchmarks against New Jersey public colleges and the following schools in the Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges (COPLAC):

- College of Charleston
- Eastern Connecticut State University
- Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
- Richard Stockton College of New Jersey
- SUNY Geneseo
- The College of New Jersey
- Truman State University
- University of Mary Washington

The college strives for continuous improvement, and some areas are further along than others. Yet the college can point to numerous examples of changes and improvements that followed directly from efforts to assess effectiveness. The evolution of the planning, budget, and assessment process is a major example, but there are many others.

In 2001, the president convened a number of committees to provide information for the strategic planning process. The Chandler Commission collected data about employee ratios and then benchmarked this information against other state colleges in New Jersey. The comparative faculty ratios supported the need for a larger faculty and the strategic plan called for hiring five new faculty members per year.

In another example, the college-wide Diversity Action Committee (DAC) surveyed the college community using the Campus Climate Survey. The survey results supported the hiring of an ombudsperson in fall 2008 to support the Diversity Action Committee’s pledge “to respect and value personal uniqueness and differences” as stated in its vision statement. (DAC Climate Survey Summary available in the Resource Room).

Academic assessment has been an institutional focus since 2006. All academic majors were required to develop assessment plans. For each academic program, this involved developing goals and objectives; developing curriculum maps; and implementing assessment activities. Every five years, each academic major undertakes a self-study, which now requires a section on assessment. Assessment plans must be integrated into the design and development of new academic programs. In summer 2008, the provost redefined the vice provost position to include a focus on assessment.

Assessment also informed decisions in Residence Life. In 2006-2007, resident assistants/community assistants were responsible for individual programs for their respective floors, but student staff indicated that residents were not attending the programs they had organized. The following year, Residence Life changed the programming model to building-wide programs, eliminating individual programs. Unfortunately, results from the 2008 Association of College and University Housing Officers, International/Educational Benchmarking, Incorporated (ACUHO-I/EBI) resident student survey indicated that this model was not successful either. The study found that residents were even less satisfied with the programming in the residence halls.

After analyzing the survey results and the impact of recent changes, Residence Life developed a new programming model consisting of building-wide events and weekly programs called Community Developers. Scheduling them for the same day and time each week ensures residents always know when these programs will occur. This change proved to be very successful, with more residents attending programs. The 2008-2009 ACUHO-I/EBI Resident Study results indicated that residents were more satisfied with Residence Life programming overall (survey results available in the Resource Room).
Inherent in Ramapo College's Strategic Plan 2007–2012 is the need to plan for external events, such as an economic downturn and reduced state support for higher education, that could impact the college negatively if not properly planned for. These same conditions emphasize the importance of the planning, budgeting, and assessment process. For the college to remain vital and move forward, it was imperative to find a way to make resources available for strategic initiatives. The president's commitment to setting aside 2% of the operational budget for strategic initiatives went a long way toward building support for the new process. With funding secured and a transparent review process in place, enthusiasm grew with the reassurance that the institution could survive and even flourish in this economic environment.

FINDINGS OF THE SELF-STUDY

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Completed second full cycle of the planning, budget and assessment process.
- Institutional commitment to allocation of funds (2% of operating budget) for new strategic initiatives.
- Identified and implemented new assessment software (WEAVEonline).
- Successfully modified the internal processes to accommodate assessment initiatives.

CHALLENGES

- To continue to secure funding for strategic initiatives during a time of shrinking resources; this often means reallocating resources.
- To continue to transform the informal organization into the formal infrastructure by instituting new protocols and procedures as needed.
- To continue to move the institution forward in a context of shrinking resources (human, financial, physical space, and technological).
- To continue to move the culture of assessment forward.
- To maintain transparency in the decision-making process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Develop a method for intra-unit and divisional communication and develop ways to link divisional action plans vertically and horizontally.
- Consolidate all the information, processes, procedures, and outcomes of resource committees under the Institutional Effectiveness Committee and include them on the Institutional Effectiveness Web site for purposes of transparency.
- Improve the communication and transparency of assessment processes across the campus community.