

Mount Holyoke College

PLANNING PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

Mount Holyoke College is committed to comprehensive institutional planning that integrates strategic planning, facilities master planning, annual planning for the College as a whole and for its divisions, and on-going assessment that utilizes results for improvement. The planning cycle integrates four functions:

- § Institutional research and assessment
- § Strategic, facilities, and financial planning
- § Annual operating planning and budgeting
- § Reaccreditation self-study

The College has adopted a five-year strategic planning period tied to the reaccreditation cycle set by the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC).

There are two linked planning cycles:

- § Strategic planning takes place in the final year of the five-year planning cycle, which is also the year preceding the preparation of a ten-year NEASC self-study or a fifth-year NEASC report. In this way, self-study documents can report on the success of the most recent strategic plan, introduce the new plan, explain why the College has adopted its new goals, and provide this information to the self-study groups or individuals developing the appraisals expected by NEASC and by the Mount Holyoke community. A five-year financial plan is an integral component of, and coincides with, the strategic plan. The strategic plan can and should be modified within a planning period if annual research-based analyses reveal a need for change.
- § The annual planning cycle ties College and divisional planning to financial planning and budgeting. The goal is to launch each fiscal year with clear and measurable goals and objectives aimed at supporting the current strategic plan, and to allocate funds in accordance with the College's priorities.

Institutional planning is a function of the President of the College and the Board of Trustees. The President delegates much of work of planning to, and seeks advice from, the Senior Advisor

to the President, the College Planning Committee (which every 5th year expands into the Strategic Planning Committee), and the Officers and Senior Staff of the College. The College/Strategic Planning Committee, in turn, does its work in consultation with the faculty as a whole, existing standing committees, staff, students, alumnae, and others.

Institutional planning integrates College-wide and divisional goals, extends into all departments, and actively involves a wide cross-section of the institution. A culture of planning and assessment should permeate College functions from top to bottom.

ELEMENTS OF PLANNING

PURPOSE OF PLANNING

The underlying concepts of research, evaluation, decision making, hypothesis testing, adjustments in the face of new findings and changed conditions serve as the foundation for planning. At the institutional level, planning is designed to focus and concentrate institutional energy and guide resource allocation to achieve highest- priority institutional goals.

GUIDES FOR THE PLANNING PROCESS: MISSION, VALUES, VISION

MISSION

Mount Holyoke's mission is to provide an intellectually adventurous education in the liberal arts and sciences through academic programs recognized internationally for their excellence and range; to draw students from all backgrounds into an exceptionally diverse and inclusive learning community with a highly accomplished, committed, and responsive faculty and staff; to continue building on the College's historic legacy of leadership in the education of women; and to prepare students, through a liberal education integrating curriculum and careers, for lives of thoughtful, effective, and purposeful engagement in the world. (Board of Trustees, 2013)

VALUES

Core values express a college's most fundamental beliefs, sometimes expressed as guiding principles. These beliefs or principles encapsulate part or all of the college's essence – the driving forces that identify it as a distinctive institution. Implicitly or explicitly, values shape and are shaped by the way the college assesses needs, identifies goals, and sets priorities.

Some of these core values are explicit in our mission statement: academic excellence, diversity and inclusion, women's education, purposeful engagement. Others implicitly guide our work together. A campus-wide discussion of these principles, characteristics,

and commitments of the College—shared or contested—is an important element of strategic planning. The Mount Holyoke community should periodically attempt to name and prioritize those values, and examine the extent to which these principles are shared.

VISION

A vision is a narrative depiction of the institution as it would be at some designated future time if institutional hopes and aspirations could be fully realized. The purpose of a vision statement is to provide a more expansive direction to individual plans of shorter duration. Many parts of the College, including many academic departments, have a clear vision of where they hope to be in five to ten years, and developing statements of such visions can be an important part of divisional and departmental planning. More critical to institutional planning, though, is a vision statement for the College as a whole. What is our shared image of the future we seek to create? Toward what are we moving, and why?

TYPES OF PLANS

Facilities Master Plan (10+ YEARS)

Facilities master plans typically cover a decade or more. Such planning is often associated with campus development, and due to the large capital investment often required by renovation and new construction, long-range plans are needed to guide work on facilities, space, technology, landscape, and residence halls. This planning extends beyond the physical plant and must incorporate needs related to academic programming and student life.

INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN (5 YEARS)

The institutional strategic plan is informed by a needs assessment identifying the College's most significant goals (usually six or fewer) arrayed in priority order. Regular assessments of progress against the plan are built into the annual planning cycle. The annual cycle also provides for changes to the plan when necessary or appropriate.

DIVISIONAL STRATEGIC PLAN (5 YEARS)

Divisional strategic plans identify the major needs, goals, and objectives of each of the College's six divisions: Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Enrollment, Advancement, Finance and Administration, and the President's Office. Some major units within larger divisions (e.g. LITS in Academic Affairs) also develop strategic plans. For ease of reference, we will call all such plans "divisional" whether they cover a division or a

department. NEASC expects that colleges and universities will plan at all levels of institutional life, and this has become Mount Holyoke's expectation for itself as well.

ANNUAL OPERATING PLANS (1 YEAR)

Annual operating plans are derivative. They are documents describing how individual divisions or departments will focus their energies on achieving strategic goals at the larger institutional and divisional levels. Annual operating plans identify initiatives and projects, adopt measurable objectives, assign responsibilities, and specify timelines for completion.

FINANCIAL PLANNING (FIVE YEARS) AND BUDGET DEVELOPMENT (ANNUAL)

A five-year financial plan is part of the College's strategic plan. The annual budget supports the annual operating plan, projecting anticipated revenues and how the institution will use those revenues to advance its goals and objectives. The annual budget, and the larger financial plan of which it is a part, should reflect the priorities established in the institutional strategic plan and the divisional strategic plans. In this way, the strategic planning process informs the financial planning and budgeting processes. This relationship between strategic, financial, and budget planning has been a hallmark of Mount Holyoke's last several plans.

INTEGRATED PLANNING PROCESS

Mount Holyoke's planning process integrates four functions:

- § Institutional research and assessment
- § Strategic, facilities, and financial planning
- § Annual operating planning and budgeting
- § Reaccreditation self-study

The planning process is recursive. It begins with research, leading to a status report on the state of the College describing the current standing of the institution, or a division of it, across a spectrum of internal and external dimensions. This status report informs the strategic and operational planning processes. In turn, the strategic plan informs the NEASC five-year self-study or tenth-year review by assessing the outcomes of the former plan and explaining the purposes to be addressed in the new one. The strategic plan also informs financial planning and budget development, which reflect the established institutional or divisional priorities, all of which produce data for the next cycle of research and planning.

STEP 1 Institutional research and assessment

informs

STEP 2 Strategic and financial planning

informs

STEP 3 Annual operating planning and budgeting

informs

STEP 4 Reaccreditation self-study

informs a new cycle of

STEP 1 Institutional research and assessment

STEP 1: INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT

Data Collection and Interpretation

The institutional strategic planning process begins with research-based data collection and an environmental scan. Through its Institutional Research office, Mount Holyoke College implements an annual research and assessment function. The College Planning Committee, augmented every fifth year to become a Strategic Planning Committee, will collaborate with the College's Institutional Research office to orchestrate the data collection and interpretation effort in support of the strategic planning process. It may make use of additional resources such as research staff or outside consultants.

Environmental Scan

The environmental scan augments the College's standard institutional research functions through outreach (via surveys, focus groups, etc.) to various college constituencies, including the Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, students, and alumnae. Usually the scan includes a SWOT analysis: a look at strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for key areas of the College and for the College as a whole. The SWOT approach helps ensure that the environmental scan looks not only at internal aspects of the College, but also at such external factors as the admissions climate, employer expectations for our graduates, and financial trends.

Outcomes Assessment

This research step includes review of key institutional texts (e.g. mission statement, learning goals, values and vision statements, brand platform) as well as the current

strategic, divisional, and master plans. The review includes assessment of continued appropriateness and relevance, and of progress and outcomes.

Status Report

The status report is a narrative which organizes, integrates, and interprets the research data from all sources, external and internal, explaining its significance for institutional life. It presents a freeze-frame picture of the current status of the College and its parts. It also sets the stage for the needs assessment, and it informs the selection and priority listing of strategic goals and measurable objectives. It moves from the past and the present towards the future, from an appropriately backward and inward review to a necessarily forward- and outward-looking identification of needs.

STEP 2: STRATEGIC AND FINANCIAL PLANNING

Needs Assessment

The status report identifies institutional needs. These needs are confined to a relatively small set, usually six or fewer, of the most important or urgent needs facing the College. They are then arranged in priority order and expressed in the form of needs statements. In this manner, the institution's needs are condensed into a concise agenda of challenges to be addressed.

Strategic Goals

The strategic goals are the needs statements expressed in the form of institutional goals, which, if achieved, would address and meet the needs. Strategic goal statements tend to be general, aiming at achieving a broad purpose.

Objectives and Strategies

Measurable objectives or strategies state as precisely as possible what is to be accomplished, to what extent, by whom, and by when. Often these objectives are put into chronological order, showing a sequence of objectives to be achieved by semester or year. This approach allows for progress to be measured in incremental phases.

Financial Planning

To be successful, strategic planning goals must align with fiscal realities. The central question is: Can the College afford its aspirations? If funding is insufficient, then aspirations may need to be moderated or curtailed. However, the strategic planning process is intended to stretch institutions to higher levels of performance than they might have deemed possible, so financial realities should inform but not drive strategic goal setting, even as they may limit how much progress can be made in any given period of time.

Integrated Planning

At the end of this process of review, alignment, and approval, the Strategic Planning Committee recommends an institutional strategic plan. A financial plan is then developed to fund the strategic initiatives over the five-year planning period. The annual budgeting process then reflects the incremental allocation of funds which the financial plan envisions.

STEP 3: ANNUAL OPERATING PLANNING AND BUDGETING

Annual Review and Reporting

During each of the first four years of the strategic planning cycle, the College Planning Committee conducts a formative evaluation. It conducts an abbreviated review process, starting with a brief re-examination of leading institutional documents. It also undertakes research and analysis, relying primarily on data from the year concluded (without environmental scan). It then formulates a concise status report focusing on environmental changes, outcomes assessment, and progress toward achieving the strategic planning goals. As warranted, modifications to the strategic plan are adopted and then appended to it, making the institutional strategic plan an accretion.

Annual Planning

After the College has adopted its goals for the next five years, the planning focus shifts from ends to means and from five-year to one-year periods. Operational planning takes place at the divisional and departmental level, with the intention of focusing College resources and energies on strategic goals set forth in the strategic plan.

The operational planning format is concise and deliberately reductive. It shows the goals and objectives to be achieved, actions to be undertaken, requirements, task assignments, and dates for completion. Operating plans are also called 'action plans' because they are blueprints for action.

STEP 4: REACCREDITATION SELF-STUDY

In the year following the development of the College's new institutional strategic plan, a major NEASC activity is conducted: either a fifth-year report or a full ten-year self-study. The strategic planning process, which occurred in the prior year, supplies the self-study committees or working groups with a wealth of substantially current information. It also allows committees to frame their reports within the context of accomplishments during the previous five years and a new plan designed to address current needs.

PLANNING SCHEDULE

THE CURRENT CYCLE

2015-2016 (FY16)	Year 0	Strategic Planning Committee	Develop plan for 2016-2021
2016-2017 (FY17)	Year 1	College Planning Committee	Prepare self-study for NEASC Tenth Year Report for Fall 2017
2017-2018 (FY18)	Year 2	College Planning Committee	
2018-2019 (FY19)	Year 3	College Planning Committee	
2019-2020 (FY20)	Year 4	College Planning Committee	
2020-2021 (FY21)	Year 5 and 0	Strategic Planning Committee	Develop plan for 2021-2026

STRUCTURE FOR THE PLANNING PROCESS

Institutional planning is a function of the President of the College and the Board of Trustees. The President delegates much of work of planning to, and seeks advice from, the Senior Advisor to the President, the College Planning Committee (which every 5th year expands into the Strategic Planning Committee), and the Officers and Senior Staff of the College. The College/Strategic Planning Committee, in turn, does its work in consultation with the existing standing committees, faculty, staff, students, alumnae, and others.

STRATEGIC PLANNING COMMITTEE / COLLEGE PLANNING COMMITTEE

The strategic planning process is overseen by a Planning Committee chaired by the President. The committee's name and responsibilities change depending on whether the committee is developing a strategic plan or monitoring the plan's implementation. The committee's membership includes students, faculty, staff, and administrators. The committee expands to include trustees and alumnae during strategic planning years.

Strategic Planning Committee (SPC)

Planning Year 2015-2016

- § Charge: To consult widely and iteratively with campus and external constituencies, gather information about the state of the College and factors likely to affect its choices in the future, engage as openly as possible with the community, and produce a strategic plan featuring strategic goals for the College, accompanied by measurable draft objectives, for approval by the Board of Trustees in May 2016.

- § Membership: Three teaching faculty, two students, two staff, two trustees, one or two alumnae, Dean of Faculty, Vice President for Finance and Administration, Dean of the College, Senior Advisor to the President, Director of Institutional Research, Director of Library, Information, and Technology Services, and the President.

College Planning Committee (CPC)

Implementation Years 2016-17, 2017-18, 2018-19, 2019-20

- § Charge: To monitor the implementation of the strategic plan and propose adjustments as needed.

- § Membership: Three teaching faculty, two students, two staff, Dean of Faculty, Vice President for Finance and Administration, Dean of the College, Senior Advisor to the President, Director of Institutional Research, Director of Library, Information, and Technology Services, and the President.

Strategic Planning Committee (SPC)

Planning Year 2020-2021

§ As above under Strategic Planning Committee

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

Faculty Members: SPC/CPC

- § 3 members of the teaching faculty
- § Elected by the faculty from nominations by the Faculty Conference Committee
- § Any rank
- § Any department or division, though no more than 1 from a single department
- § Preference for 1 from each of the 3 divisions
- § Terms of 3 years, with the option to extend for a second 3-year term

Staff Members: SPC/CPC

- § 2 members of the staff
- § Appointed by the President from nominations by Staff Council
- § Normally, one staff member from staff represented by Staff Council and one staff member from the OPC
- § Normally, terms of 5 years

Students: SPC/CPC

- § Juniors or seniors, normally one of each, serving from appointment until graduation
- § Application process overseen by the SGA
- § Appointed by the President on recommendation of the current SPC/CPC students

Administrators: SPC/CPC

- § President (Chair)
- § Senior Advisor to the President (Convener)
- § Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty
- § Vice President for Finance and Administration
- § Vice President for Student Affairs and Dean of the College
- § Director of Institutional Research
- § Director of Library, Information, and Technology Services

Trustees (SPC)

- § Appointed by the Chair of the Board
- § Terms of one year

Alumnae (SPC)

- § President of the Alumnae Association, or delegate
- § Option of one additional alumna appointed by the President
- § Term(s) of one year

August 2015

