

**Youngstown State University  
Office of the Provost**

**The Academic Strategic Plan: Outline of Process**

The Academic Strategic Plan for Youngstown State University arises within a historical context and responds to a set of driving forces affecting our University and public education generally in Ohio and across the country. The latter forces include issues of funding, access, student preparedness, shifting regional demographics, competition for students, tensions between liberal and professional education, technology, and diversity.

The historical context for our planning activities is reflected in the University's Mission Statement and its Vision Statement, both of which were affirmed as part of the University's Centennial Strategic Plan.

**Mission**

*Youngstown State University provides open access to high-quality education through a broad range of affordable certificate, associate, baccalaureate, and graduate programs.*

*The University is dedicated to*

- *outstanding teaching, scholarship, and service and to forging connections among these three interactive components of its mission;*
- *fostering student-faculty relationships that enrich teaching and learning, develop scholarship, and encourage public service;*
- *promoting diversity and an understanding of global perspectives;*
- *advancing the intellectual, cultural, and economic life of the state and region.*

**Vision**

*Youngstown State University will become a national model for student-centered comprehensive urban universities, transforming*

*its students into successful professionals, scholars, citizens, and leaders.*

*Building upon its tradition of developing the body, mind, and spirit, YSU will provide a full range of services and amenities to meet the needs of residential, commuter, and offsite students.*

*In partnership with schools and the corporate, public, and non-profit communities, YSU will promote diversity and excellence in teaching, research, and service to increase the educational attainment, economic prosperity, and environmental vitality of the region.*

*The University will be a center for intellectual and cultural activity and a catalyst for public engagement.*

A university's mission and vision statements provide the fundamental reasons for the institution's existence and an aspirational statement about the future, respectively. Ultimately, it is the latter that needs to be more central in any planning process. A strategic plan should identify a set of objectives or goals and the pathways or strategies by which an institution expects to realize its articulated vision. Some of these pathways are broadly sketched directions, while others refer to measurable outcomes. To identify a set of aspirations for the future of the academic division as well as a series of action steps to realize those aspirations, we need to begin by engaging in a comprehensive review of our academic programs. Program review is, however, only a prelude to the more challenging tasks of planning. By design, our planning work in 2006 and 2007 is contemporaneous with the preparation of a self-study document in anticipation of the Higher Learning Commission's scheduled reaccreditation visit in February 2008 and the University's Centennial in that same year. The significant overlap in some details of these activities motivates the timing of our planning process.

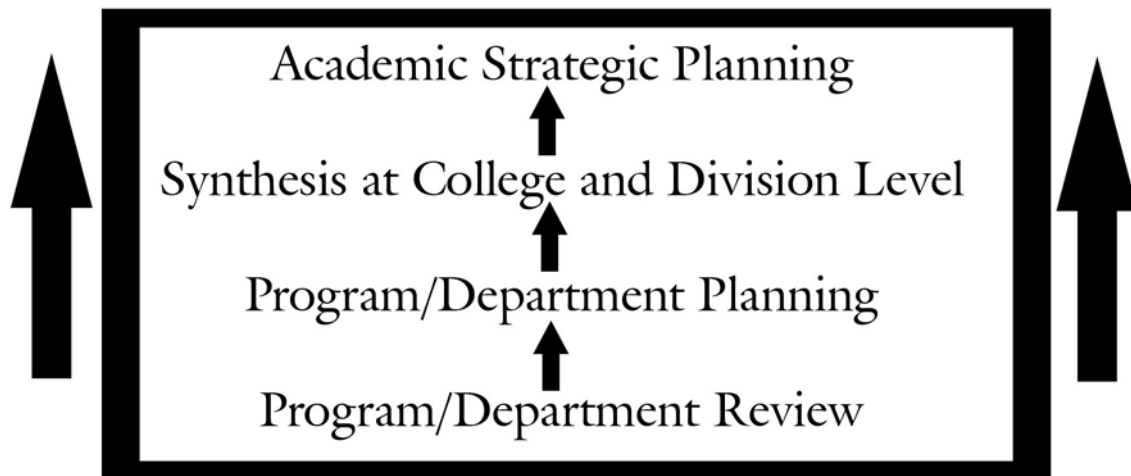
We need to be mindful in our planning process of the ways our accomplishments in realizing previous strategic goals guide and inform our future but do not constrain it. In this regard, the review document described below must highlight strategic accomplishments within the Centennial Plan. Critical Issue 2 is the most relevant to our endeavors:

### **Programs/Teaching, Learning, and Research**

*YSU will promote excellence in teaching, learning, service and research – and prepare students to undertake civic leadership responsibilities – through programs and educational experiences that meet student and workforce needs.*

## Program/Department Review

In broad outline, the planning process for the Academic Strategic Plan is a process whereby plans and documents are generated at the program, department, college, and division levels. To promote comparability of the documents within and across departments, an ad hoc committee [membership below] worked through the spring 2006 semester to develop a template for the individual self-studies. In the charge to that committee, members were asked to develop a framework for review that would be broadly appropriate across the range of disciplines and departments at Youngstown State University. The revised protocol for program review is attached.



As noted in the schematic above, department plans will percolate upward to the college for review and synthesis. The outcome of this process will be a set of strategic plans for the individual academic colleges and for the School of Graduate Studies and Research. Finally, these plans and documents will be considered and synthesized at the divisional level, where a draft Academic Strategic Plan will be generated. Throughout the entire process, there is an expectation that activities will be highly consultative. The Academic Strategic Plan needs to be the product of our collective commitment and energies.

A preliminary question that has been asked in several contexts concerns the level of unit for initial review. This question applies most obviously in complex departments where several academic majors may be administered. We leave to the departments the question of whether it makes sense to begin with independent program reviews or a more comprehensive department review. The former approach may be more productive when there is relatively little overlap among the various majors, and the latter when such overlap exists. In either

case, however, the department needs to produce a self-study document that indicates the present strengths and challenges for the department.

The Office of Institutional Research will provide some common data points to all departments for their use. However, as programs, departments, colleges, and the division undertake review and planning, we need to remember that the data supplied by Institutional Research and in our own collection are statements of past activity. These data are preliminary indications of past and present health of programs and departments; they need to be supplemented by other measures, including qualitative ones. The focus of the planning activity is the future.

### The Planning Phase

The planning phase of the activity begins when the unit considers future aspirations. Who do we wish to be in five years? Ten years? Consideration of such questions needs to be embedded within the various disciplines practiced at the University and in the ways those disciplines continue to evolve, as well as within the University's overarching mission and vision. Each planning/review document should relate the unit's aspirations and goals to our mission and vision. As a roadmap document, the plan should also identify measurable steps to assess progress and direction. The various colleges may introduce modifications of the proposed process, but attention to the department's priorities needs to drive construction of the departmental document.

One of the driving forces affecting our institution is the diminishing public support for public education. An ever-increasing share of educational costs is borne by our students and their families; there are obvious limits to the extent to which we can shift financial burdens from the state to our students. What this means, ultimately, is that we should not expect that significant additional resources will be available to us, at least during the first years of our academic plan. Nevertheless, each document should address the expected needs for the unit to achieve the goals that are set. What are the challenges and/or the barriers to realizing the unit's aspirations? Such statements may have use in assembling case statements and needs lists for institutional advancement. The Academic Strategic Plan will also help us to make the necessary decisions about the investment of resources and about our mix of programs, precisely because it is embedded in our mission and our University mission. The need to align institutional resources with institutional mission is always a compelling one.

### Role of the Colleges

Department plans provide a base to begin college plans for the future. Each college will need to decide on the best structure for departmental plans to be reviewed and assessed; the DAC may be the most appropriate venue. There should be a broadly consultative process to shape the collegiate planning document. In addition to departmental plans, colleges may wish to ask for

additional input documents, e.g., from the college advising office or from other stakeholders. Each academic dean is charged to oversee the process that will end with a college plan. Once again, the plan should include aspirations, priorities, and measurable outcomes. The college plan needs to be more than a compilation and collection of departmental documents. It needs to refer specifically to the mission and vision of the college as well as to the present and future identity of the college. How does the college prioritize the departmental priorities mentioned within its individual plans? How does the college use departmental identities and aspiration to craft a coherent identity and set of aspirations for itself? How does the college shape the future for the composite departments?

College documents should address the ways programs and departments complement one another. Certain themes are appropriately addressed in a summative manner later in the planning process but still require input from individual departments or colleges. Themes that impact on individual departments include but are not limited to serving a large role in providing remedial, general education courses, and/or offering a mixture of programs. Other themes might include the experience for first-year students, the possible impact of community college initiatives on our division, the state of academic facilities on the campus, resource needs for technology, the mix of academic programs, etc.

### Graduate Education

Although the primary locus for the integration of department plans will be at the college level, the School of Graduate Studies and Research needs to play a vital role in this process as well. There is a separate, ongoing process by which graduate programs are reviewed on our campus. We need to take advantage of this process to supplement individual program reviews and to ask the School of Graduate Studies and Research to play one of the key roles in crafting a strategic plan for Academic Affairs. To facilitate this expectation, copies of department documents should be sent to the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research when they are sent to the college offices. Similarly, the academic colleges should copy their respective planning documents to the School of Graduate Studies and Research when they are submitted to the provost. A planning document from the Graduate School will be submitted to the divisional office for review and integration with the collegiate plans as the divisional plan is drafted.

### Other Academic Units

A similar process should be undertaken by other units within the academic division: the Honors Program, the Office of Institutional Research, Maag Library, the Office of Assessment, General Education, the Center for International Studies and Programs, and so forth are asked to participate as appropriate. In

some cases, it may be appropriate for these units to provide input and assistance to departments and colleges; in other cases, a planning document from the unit may also be appropriate. Academic advisors are asked to participate in college-level planning but also, as a collective and in collaboration with the colleges, to suggest a plan for the future of academic advising on the campus.

### Academic Affairs Review

The next level of review is the divisional one. Review of collegiate plans is expected to occur preliminarily at the Deans' Council. However, that level of review and planning is merely preliminary to a global consideration of the emerging documents by members of the academic division. We anticipate that there will be a series of presentations to faculty and staff, focus group discussions, and engagement with the Academic Senate, with other divisions of the University, and with the President. This wider consultation is necessary to ensure that the academic plan comports well with other divisional plans and with the University's planning documents.

### Organizing Issues

One of the most challenging questions for many higher education institutions is the question of distinctiveness. What distinguishes our institution from other institutions that are by some measure "like us?" Phrased differently, what is it about Youngstown State University that should make us the destination of choice for prospective students from Youngstown, the region, and beyond? The answer to this question derives ultimately from our mission and our vision. And the answer to this question drives our recruiting efforts and our planning activities.

Several themes recur in our mission statement, our vision, the YSU Strategic Plan, and other statements of our identity. Among these themes are the following:

- Metropolitan campus
- Public university
- Open access
- Affordable
- Excellence of academic programs
- Connections between classroom and external experiences
- Links between teaching, learning, and research
- Community and civic engagement
- Mix of traditional and nontraditional students
- Increasing diversity
- Linkage among YSU, urban, and regional development

These themes and others have worked together to produce the exciting mix of academic and nonacademic programs on our campus today. For example, many

of our major programs require or allow for student practica and internships as part of the academic preparation. Equally, YSU is proud of its partnership with the City of Youngstown and with regional development initiatives, including workforce development and advanced manufacturing initiatives. Consideration of a community college, an investigation that was mandated by the Board of Trustees, stems directly from a reconsideration of the role of the University in the region and the need to increase access to an enhanced set of higher education options.

In a series of discussions during the spring and early summer months, the deans and other groups were asked to help shape the academic planning process by linking our distinctiveness as an institution to the University's mission and vision. We propose as a heuristic the following formulation of our academic distinctiveness:

**“YSU is a public university for the public good committed to  
excellence, engagement, and meaningful experience  
in diverse settings.”**

Incarnations of this formulation necessarily vary across colleges and departments, and it is the composite realizations that comprise our institutional distinction. Such a formula is obviously limited in its level of detail, but it provides a useful point of departure for our academic planning documents. At the very least, it provides an encapsulation around which departments may anchor their review and plans.

The notion of a public university for the public good relates not only to access but also to diversity defined in racial, socioeconomic, and other terms. It also entails sufficient academic and other support to promote graduation within a reasonable time frame and a sensitivity to the challenges derived from shrinking state support and limited financial aid. Our commitment to the public good is also manifest in the array of academic programs that we offer. These programs prepare our students for productive lives as ethical and engaged citizens in critical fields. Departments and colleges work with local industry and with civic organizations to spur regional development to increase the number of employment opportunities in the region.

“Excellence, engagement, and meaningful experience” refers to the educational opportunities and achievements at Youngstown State University. The size of our institution enables students to work directly and closely with talented and dedicated faculty at the undergraduate level. Undergraduate research opportunities abound across the campus. Individual academic programs are nationally accredited where appropriate. YSU students compete and excel

regionally and nationally across a range of disciplines. We are justifiably proud of our academic programs and the achievements of our faculty and students.

Student engagement and experience are evident in the mix of traditional and nontraditional students on our campus and in the many internship and practicum experiences offered. There are challenges associated with YSU's identity as a metropolitan commuter campus, but this identity also means that our students are engaged members of the surrounding communities. The challenge is for us to engage commuter students meaningfully in "the life of the campus," and we do this regularly by the nature of our academic programs as well as in partnership with Student Affairs. A graduate of YSU is someone who has received an excellent education, who is prepared for productive employment or further study, who understands and responds to the needs of civic engagement, and who is an active member of the community. The future leaders of our community (and others) in terms of economic development and public service will be drawn from our graduates.

### Key Elements of the Plan

Departmental and collegiate documents as well as the divisional academic plan need, then, to address the following four elements explicitly:

- The academic programs
- Engagement and student experience
- Diversity in all its manifestations (e.g., racial, socioeconomic, international, etc.)
- Partnerships and community involvement

Discussion of the academic program(s) obviously focuses on the curriculum and the ways in which it is central to our mission and to our institutional excellence. Programs and departments should be sure to address degree programs as well as their contributions to General Education, to the Honors Program, to developmental education, or to other service teaching offered within the unit. Department documents should describe the ways departments collaborate with other units both internally and externally. The present and future role of distance learning, when appropriate, should be documented and addressed. Departmental documents should highlight assessment plans and results.

It will also be appropriate for departments, where appropriate, to address undergraduate and graduate curricula separately. In the same way that interdisciplinarity is considered within the planning document, so too should the intersection of graduate and undergraduate concerns be discussed. How do these components of the department's activities enrich one another? How do both articulate with research activities for faculty and opportunities for students? There should also be some explicit discussion of research and scholarship as

departmental initiatives; how do these integrate with teaching and service? How does this integration relate to mission?

Planning documents are most effective when they include measures by which the relative success, qualitative and quantitative, of an initiative can be gauged. It is essential that documents generated at every level include such measures. What are the measures used to assess student and programmatic success? Success in research and scholarship? Success in partnership and community involvement? Similarly, what are the measures of engagement for our students in relevant aspects of the plan? How do we measure the experiential component of our programs?

Inevitably, the question of document length will be raised. No particular length is prescribed for department or college planning documents. In every case, however, it is essential that sufficient information/data be supplied (either within the text or as an attachment) so that the case for particular priorities is a compelling one.

In summary, the Academic Strategic Plan will include nested sets of aspirations and goals as well as explicit action items and metrics. The planning process builds upon our institutional strengths and values. Properly realized, the Academic Strategic Plan will provide us with a blueprint for continued excellence that is congruent with our academic distinctiveness and our mission.

**Outline of levels of review:**

- Department/Program Review Committees
- College Review Committees/DACs/School of Graduate Studies and Research
- University Review Committee
- Provost
- Academic Senate
- President
- Board of Trustees

**Planning workshop:**

A planning workshop for chairs and members of departmental planning committees will be held in early September 2006.

**Preliminary deadlines:**

- Department Reviews and Plans due in College offices and the School of Graduate Studies and Research – December 5, 2006

- College Reviews and Plans due in Provost's Office and School of Graduate Studies and Research – February 1, 2007
- School of Graduate Studies and Research Plan due in Provost's Office – February 14, 2007
- Draft Academic Strategic Plan for circulation – March 5, 2007
- Academic Strategic Plan presented to President – April 27, 2007

### **Membership of Ad Hoc Program Review Committee [Spring 2006]**

- Michael Theall, CATALYST, Co-Chair
- Cynthia Hirtzel, Engineering, Co-Chair
- Susan Russo, Art
- Bege Bowers, Provost's Office
- Sharon Stringer, Assessment
- Sunil Ahuja, Political Science
- Mary Lou DiPillo, Education
- Becky Geltz, Institutional Research
- Joseph Mosca, Social Work
- Tod Porter, Economics
- Jane Reid, Marketing
- Dorcas Fitzgerald, Nursing

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