Strategic Planning Evaluation (Spring 10)

Introduction
The current study was designed to evaluate, from a staff perspective, Gavilan College’s strategic planning process around several dimensions:
- Plan awareness
- Plan integration into other planning processes
- Plan involvement
In addition to assessing its effectiveness, the study also focused on how to improve the current strategic planning processes.

Methods
Since the current study was the first time the Gavilan College strategic planning process was to be evaluated, it was decided a more exploratory, qualitatively-rich data collection would be most useful. As such, the semi-structured interview was selected as the most appropriate method.

A total of 10 interviews were conducted with a small sample from each major College constituency: Staff, Faculty, and Managers/Administrators. Based on the Fall 08 staffing levels[^1], the following represents the approximate participation levels of the respective groups: 4 Professional Support staff interviews, 1.8% (114 total), 4 Faculty interviews, 1.7% (234 total), and 2 Administrators/Managers interviews, 6.6% (30 total).

The interviewees were randomly selected and contacted via phone and/or email and asked to participate. All those contacted participated except for one who did not respond to repeated contacts. As a result, another potential participant was randomly selected. The interviews took approximately 15-30 minutes and included six prompts (see Appendix A). All identifying information was eliminated from both the notes and the summaries to protect the confidentiality of participants.

Results
Plan awareness
When asked about how much they knew about the current plan and the process, all but one participant reported that they new “nothing” or “very little”. All except for one participant who actually served on the committee knew little or nothing about how the plan was developed or updated. Nearly all knew where they might locate the plan, however, only three had actually viewed the plan.

Plan Integration into other planning process
In regards to how the strategic plan drives or is integrated with the budget allocations process, some participants understood the unit plan process very well and how it integrates

[^1]: Staff figures were taken from the ’08/’09 CCCO report and some categories were different from the categories used in the survey item.
with the budget prioritization process, but these same participants did not seem to understand the connection between the unit plans and the strategic planning process. Others interviewed knew nothing about either processes.

**Plan Involvement**

Responses varied on whether or not the participants felt as if members of their group could participate. Some participants suggested that they felt like they could participate, but others said that they lacked the information or the time to actually participate. Still other participants felt that their opinions and input was not or would not be valued or incorporated.

**Current Planning Operation and Suggested Improvements**

Several respondents reported that the strategic planning seemed to be operating poorly, while others reported that they thought it seemed to be operating well. One respondent commented that the amount of information and involvement seemed to be greater than the other institution where the respondent currently worked.

Nevertheless, most participants had suggested improvements. Several respondents acknowledged the challenges associated with increasing involvement in the strategic planning process such as the time and or interest of many of the staff and faculty. Some suggestions included providing more information on the committee, its processes, its proceedings, its meeting times, and how the College is proceeding on the plan. Others suggested providing a simple easy to digest primer on how the committee works and how it fits into the planning process. As far as mechanisms for providing this information, some participants suggested presenting it at staff development, via email, or in-person at workshops or forums.

Other participants suggested that there was a need to incorporate more internal and external input on the development or updates to the plan. Several participants suggested that forums be put together so the College community could attend in-person to discuss strategic planning issues. Another suggested that the unit planning process needed to be more collaborative at the departmental-level, thus strengthening the strategic planning process since unit planned data is used to set strategic planning priorities. Another participant suggested that the unit plan process needed to be based on more of an action plan model.

**Summary**

Prior to summarizing the results, the limitations of the current study must be acknowledged. Firstly, and most importantly, the sample of participants is very small. Making any conclusions or recommendations based on such a small sample can be problematic. Additionally, interviews and other qualitative methods are difficult to quantify and extract meaningful data. These concerns aside, the intent of this study was to explore the strategic planning process from a staff perspective and collect a range of responses and suggestions.

Based on the current study, awareness, communication, and involvement are all areas of concern for at least some participants. The lack of information about the committee, its
process, and its integration with the planning and budgeting process is significant. This lack of understanding corresponds with past findings from other Shared Governance surveys (See Shared President’s Council Report, Fall 09 and Fall 07). To the contrary, the unit planning process seems to be relatively well-understood for many participants. Additionally, the Intranet is seen by all participants as a source for information.

There were a variety of suggestions offered to improve communication and involvement. These included: simplified information on the committee, and brief information on the proceedings. Other suggestions for input were to broaden the planning process through open forums.

The respondents noted that, even with these methods, a certain proportion of staff and faculty will not learn more or participate due to a variety of factors. Nonetheless, it does not preclude increasing communication and input opportunities to engage those who are interested in or are likely to participate.
Appendix A: Interview Prompts

❖ How much do you currently know about the strategic planning process (Explain)?

❖ Do you know where to find the current strategic plan?

❖ Do you know how the current plan drives the budget allocation process (Explain)?

❖ Do you feel like there are ways that you or members or your group can participate in the strategic planning process?

❖ How well do you think the current process is operating and why or why not?

❖ What suggestions do you have to strengthen the current strategic planning process?
Appendix B: Interview Responses*

How much do you currently know about the strategic planning process (Explain)?

- Know very little. I do get some information via emails which I do read. I think it has something to do with improving the College and has to do with budget issues.
- Virtually nothing, I’ve heard about the plan, not involved in anything.
- We are so busy here that we don’t know that much. I have learned through the executive team and its collaborative development of the unit plans.
- None, nothing about the plan.
- Know a lot about the plan because I have read the plan. I don’t know much about the process, probably collaborative but not sure.
- Not much, I don’t feel like I fee like I have enough information about how the process is done around here. I have to go out and look for it myself. I don’t receive a lot of information at manager’s meetings. I do not know that much about the process, but I do know that the SLO, program learning outcomes, and unit plans are all tied to the strategic plan. I am not sure how is it developed, rarely have I heard from the committee. I have never heard what they are doing where they are going.
- A fair amount, I know how the committee works. The unit plan thing though is a mystery and also I think that this process needs more input.
- Not much, only that it is unit plan based. I know that it has been done without wide-spread input, based on strategic plan document. I think faculty are frustrated with the process, there is not a sense of buy-in on campus. This was something that was suggested by the accreditation visit that we needed more involvement. The first plan seemed to have considerable input. The current process seems like a top-down process decided by a few.
- Very little, what I heard was from academic senate and staff development day.
- Not much, I would imagine that it lays out what the college will get done. Maybe there is some committee of faculty and board members to lay out this map.

Do you know where to find the current strategic plan?

- You can find it on the website
- On the Gavilan website
- On the intranet, I think.
- I guess on the internet, probably on the committee link.
- Yes, on the website, under one of the committees.
- I do, because I have found it on my own.
- Yes.
- Yes, on the intranet.
- The intranet, haven’t seen it yet.
- Think it is on the website, I am pretty sure.

Do you know how the current plan drives the budget allocation process (Explain)?

- I don’t know much about this. I would imagine the strategic planning would inform the budget.
- No.
- Yes, as far as I know, we do a unit plan. I don’t know the rest of the process.
- Nothing.
- Yes, the unit plans goes through to the budget committee.
- What I know is that the unit plan is tied to the strategic plan, which is tied to the unit plan, then it is moved to the budget committee, and I think they use the unit plan and look at priorities.
- Yes, create unit plan, if $ associated with it, there are deadlines, the budget committee ranks them, then a final ranking or suggested ranking is made.

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* In some cases, responses are condensed and/or edited for clarity.
The departments do a plan and the dean's assign priorities. And then the users are surprised to find out either that they did or did not get funded. Currently, the faculty have not been involved in fund allocation or at least those who are are not communicating with the rest of the faculty. Also, there are a lot of alternative routes to get funding that fall outside of the current unit plan process.

No, nothing.

Do you feel like there are ways that you or members or your group can participate in the strategic planning process?

- I think we could get involved through our department meeting and our reps who represent us at the senate. I feel like I can get involved just a matter of time. I never felt like I am excluded and I feel like my input is valued.
- No, I think that the people involved in the long term planning of the college would not be interested in my opinions. If they are, that is not the impression I get. I have ideas of things that could be improved, but there is not an avenue for that input.
- Our staff cannot participate in that stuff as they are completely occupied, so they can't really participate in anything external.
- I don't even know how the process works so I can't say. It is something I don't have control over so I don't feel like I should participate.
- Yes, in the current plan.
- I feel we can. I don't know how our members can be involved, there is no real organized way to say how to participate. It seems to be kind of random. Not sure how to get involved.
- Not totally. Maybe a survey of everyone, what ideas do you have that can better serve the community. Some people that I worked with feel as if their input has not been used. In addition, I feel like staff are not informed about important instructional issues.
- Yes, members can get involved.
- I feel like I can get involved but in what. There needs to be more information on what is the role of the strategic planning process, how to get involved, membership, meeting schedule, etc. All of this should be communicated. It should be advertised in a simple way for people to understand. Also a brief overview of what the committee is doing should be provided.
- I don't know how, but I assume faculty members are a part of it. I am sure that there is a way to but I don't know. I feel like you would be welcome in the process.

How well do you think the current process is operating and why or why not?

- I think it is operating as well as it can given the amount of time and energy people can put into it.
- I don't know much about the process, but strengthening the input processes might be needed. It might be there but it may not be communicated. Good ideas and brainpower in the hourly staff that is not tapped into. Incorporate these ideas into how to make these things better.
- The unit plan process seems like it is beneficial. It is a chance to work together with others and plan.
- Wouldn't know enough about the plan to comment one way or another.
- The strategy associated with our group was left out, passed over. The process works for some areas, but some areas it does not seem to work. It seems to be operating pretty well, the plan sounds pretty good, but some areas are not included for their input.
- Outside of the people who do unit plans, not sure people would know anything. Or how the College is progressing on the plan. I don't see how somebody would know that. More information is needed. Transparency is a huge part of about the process and the actual document. Another concern that I have is the plan incorporating new trends in education. The changes in California education are significant, are these reflected in our plan. There should be ways that we do things differently and these should be incorporated into the plan.
- Not sure because I have questions about it. The strategic planning committee reviews unit plans but the process seems weak. I am concerned about how much unit plans are valid and incorporate input. Is there community input for the unit plan? It seems like there is a lot of input that for programs do not use.
Not well, faculty involvement has been minimal for many reasons. They have a lot to do and not enough people to do it. The process that has been handed down is not the best process, not using the skills and abilities that many faculty have. It seems as if there is a bare minimum effort to post documents on proceedings. It seems like those in charge do not want to have discussions because it interrupts the efficiency of the process. There is a culture of efficiency, but nobody is trying to keep people involved.

There are areas for improvement. It is hard to get folks involved though, but more needs to be done.

I don’t know enough to say how well it is working. I see at staff development the president is giving out good information. He is providing a nice overview of what that is going on at the College. The staff development day is beneficial. I feel like here I get more information and involvement as a part time faculty than the other College that I work at, even though I have been there longer.

What suggestions do you have to strengthen the current strategic planning process?

The best way is the human approach. Have opportunities on staff development day. On mandatory days have strategic planning update meeting. That would guarantee that we are informed. It is our responsibility to take an active role. I disagree when we don’t actively take responsibility and then complain. I am well-informed by my department representatives. Try human forums: workshops, strategic planning workshop, open discussions, or round tables that fill us in on the process. Open discussion, round tables around the issues.

There may not be information out there. These ideas need to percolate to the top. It needs to be communicated.

If things were simplified that might help people with limited time.

No suggestions,

Survey more people in the planning phase. Conduct interviews with all the different constituencies groups, financial aid, and off-sites. The unit planning process seems to be working ok, an improvement.

Communication across areas, it has to involve all sectors of our College. Each category should learn about the plan the interrelationships. How we all work together. More communication is needed. I wish there were more discussions independently, open discussions with the committee and the administrators. More informal settings, coffee, events, open houses, email. No strategic planning efforts have been detailed, only budget communication. I got the impression that the plan was not modifiable. Bring in faculty, bring in faculty in an inclusive way. They should be involved in a clear way. Bring in players so you get buy in. You have a campus culture that is uniformed, communication is crucial.

Survey of staff, goals or input from the committee and formulate those into the strategic plan, or unit plan. The key is making sure that the unit plans are done collaboratively and with lots of input. The strategic planning committee needs to be broad based. Need to pull information together from all sources. Instructional program development in particular needs guidance from counselors or community groups.

Faculty senate has aggregated its responsibility to be involved. I think that unit plans and the process overall needs to be revisited. Strategic planning should be done at the mandatory staff development day. The planning process at the department level should be building an action planning model for 3-5 years. Those plans should be accessed to develop or revise the strategic plan.

Have open forums to discuss issues, make topics more attractive, open to input meetings. Lay out the basics about the committee and then ask for input.

Nothing really, because I have not been involved.