

Minutes
November 19, 2014

Present: D. Beaman, R. Couch, P. Cuper (Co-Chair), P. Francis, T. Garland, W. Holden, R. Kostick, J. Lagace, E. Proshansky, P. Striffolino (Co-Chair), L. Ware, M. Welsh, L. Wiley, K. Williams

Guests: C. Turrentine, Jennifer Dickson, Brock Thompson

1. Use of Data in Strategic Planning

Cathy Turrentine, Director of Institutional Research and Assessment, provided an overview on the effective use of information and data in strategic planning. Keeling & Associates staff members Jennifer Dickson and Brock Thompson participated by teleconference in this part of the meeting. According to Cathy, the College's last strategic planning process was not as successful as it might have been because a data-informed approach was not built into it from the outset, and she encouraged Council members to be sure to do so for this new round. The point is not to be driven by numbers or data, but we have to determine how we'll know if we've succeeded in reaching the goals we establish. That is not possible without data.

Cathy suggested an effective strategy would be for the Council to identify a few areas of emphasis that include a limited number of goals as well as targets that the college community will understand, recognize as important, and work toward. She also emphasized that the goals be measurable, meaningful, and movable (i.e., selecting areas of focus where we are already exceeding expectations will make it very difficult to demonstrate additional progress). She gave examples related to student retention and diversity which illustrated the difference between process-oriented goals ("providing a nurturing environment") and those focused on outcomes ("increasing retention and graduation rates that are equal to or exceed those at our peer institutions"), and said that we should emphasize the latter. Cathy also told the group that the College already collects and maintains a great deal of information and data, and that members should have some sense of what's available in order to avoid duplication of effort. Her office is a good source for this purpose and any questions about data should be directed to her, especially as they relate to IPEDS and how Keene compares to its peer institutions.

During discussion, the point was made that it is important to use data in addition to simply collect it, and many examples were shared of how data are utilized, at institutional, school, and department levels. There was also considerable discussion about the issue of student retention, and how important it is to assure that entering students remain at Keene, not just for economic and reputational reasons but also because it helps improve our overall selectivity. The value of SAT scores as primary indicators of student success was questioned, and the point was also made that as we proceed to develop values and goals we will have to

consider factors that aren't necessarily under our control (e.g., preparation of students upon entering the College). Still, such consideration might lead to activities that could improve this situation (e.g., partnering with high schools in this endeavor).

Jennifer and Brock were then asked to what extent Keeling & Associates might be expected to gather and provide information to the Council, especially that relating to the higher education landscape and best practices. They said that they were having a data meeting the next day to discuss this matter, and that they could respond more directly to this question after that time. This issue should also be one focus of the December 5 retreat.

2. SPC Website

Kathleen Williams demonstrated the SPC website, which is now active and can be accessed through the site directory, and will soon link off the President's page. Kathleen emphasized that the site is organic and can be expanded throughout the process as the Council determines. For now, it provides a basic overview of the process and the resources the group is using to shape its deliberations. In addition, the posting of minutes and an event calendar will help assure the process is transparent to our communities. She encouraged members to provide input and suggest changes to the site. It was also agreed that members should make their constituents aware of the site.

In response to a comment about the desirability of providing an anonymous means for community members to provide input into the strategic planning process, Kathleen agreed to think about a way to use the website for this purpose. A link on the site could allow individuals to send comments directly to Paul and Pru, without identifying the sender.

3. Connecting to the Mission Statement

Council Co-Chairs Pru Cuper and Paul Strifolino invited members to share their perspectives on the Mission Statement, since it will serve as the basis for the group's work. Several members said that it was difficult for them to feel connected to the statement, in part because they don't have much direct contact with students and they work in areas (e.g., finance) that aren't explicitly tied to the classroom. Similarly, the view was expressed that the statement doesn't necessarily speak to the concerns of some constituent groups (e.g., the College's business partners).

Others spoke positively about the statement, saying it describes and reflects Keene's mission as a public liberal arts college very well. The emphasis on critical thinking and civic responsibility is authentic and is strongly consistent with the College's history and traditions. The point was made that, while it is somewhat generic (like all mission statements), it clearly encompasses preparation for both personal and professional development. There is also

enough flexibility in the statement to enable the Council to develop a vision statement and set of values that will appeal to the campus community and establish Keene's institutional distinctiveness, an important component of strategic planning.

A valuable product of the process will be the opportunity for all individuals to think about their connections to the Mission Statement and see where their contributions fit into it. While it's easy to think of the college experience as just encompassing teaching and learning inside the classroom, an institution of higher education is much more complex than that, and there are many functions (e.g., finance, facilities) that provide the necessary infrastructure for teaching and learning to take place.

Important side conversations included a discussion about students' financial need, and how they frequently can't bridge the gap between expenses and available funding. This situation has negative consequences for the students and the College's retention efforts, so the Council should consider it and possible solutions as it develops institutional goals and action strategies.

4. December 5 Retreat

Pru and Paul distributed a preliminary agenda for the December 5 retreat, saying that this event will only include SPC members. Keeling & Associates will be on campus December 3-4 and should have sufficient opportunity to meet with individuals and groups outside the Council.

At present the consultants do not plan to have an open campus-wide session during their December 3-5 visit, but that will likely be included when they come back in late January. A question was raised as to whether there will be an open forum similar to "speak outs" that were held as part of an earlier strategic planning process. According to those who were at the College at that time, these events were very successful and helped facilitate the planning process and community buy-in. Paul and Pru agreed to meet with President Huot and ask if such a meeting would be possible.

5. Discussion of Initial Considerations

Because of time constraints, Paul and Pru will put this item on the agenda for a later meeting, but they encouraged members to send in their thoughts and also to continue to share information they are gathering from their constituents.

6. Closing Thoughts

There was some discussion about Cathy Turrentine's presentation and its emphasis on goals being measurable, meaningful and movable. The point was made that in some ways this process will be like a research project, and we are likely to learn things along the way that require us to be flexible and able to change our approach as necessary.

In closing, Paul and Pru asked that Council members let them know if they are unable to attend a Council meeting.