KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS IN STRATEGIC PLANNING

Term	Definition	Related Terms
Academic program	An organized sequence or grouping of courses leading to a defined objective - such as a major, degree, certificate, license, or transfer to another institution of higher education - through which it is intended that students will achieve stated learning outcomes.	Instructional program Non-instructional program Program Student learning outcome
Action plan	A sequence of steps that must be taken, and/or activities that must be performed well, for a strategy to succeed. An action plan typically has the following elements: specific tasks - what will be done?; resource allocation - what funds are required?; time horizon - when will it be done?; responsibility - who is responsible for getting it done?	Operational plan Plan Strategic plan
Aspirant college	A college whose practices may be emulated by another, aspiring college so that the latter may achieve improved outcomes.	Benchmarking Peer college
Assessment	The process of gathering information to systematically gauge the effectiveness and performance of the institution and academic and non-instructional programs in order to document student learning, student achievement, other impact on students, or institutional progress.	Evaluation
Baseline	The current or previous performance level that can be used to establish target improvement levels and provide a basis for assessing future progress.	Benchmarking Target
Benchmarking	Gathering information about model efforts or best practices by other institutions engaged in similar endeavors to help establish targets and goals.	Aspirant college Metric Peer college Target
Budget process	A method and timeline or cycle used by an institution to create its operating budget.	Operating budget
Buy-in	Agreement from key stakeholders that the proposed plan is acceptable.	Ownership
Case study	A study containing qualitative data - such as observations and information drawn from interviews - about one institution. The results from one case study are considered to be anecdotal evidence; however, a series of case studies may suggest that data and/or information needs to be more systematically gathered and analyzed.	Focus group Research study Survey research
Communication plan		

Continuous quality improvement	An approach to improving performance that focuses on empirical data in assessing and monitoring performance, and highlights the role of institutional processes and systems in improving performance.	Quality focus essay
Council	A participatory governance group comprised of individuals appointed or elected by constituent groups.	Leader
Data informed decision	Decision made with data obtained systematically playing a key role, rather than making a decision based on anecdotal information or purely conceptual considerations.	Decision Input Recommendation
Decision	Judgment made concerning the best course of action after having considered various factors and/or alternatives.	Data informed decision Input Recommendation
Environmental scanning	Exploration and analysis of the external factors affecting an institution, for the purpose of identifying trends and events that currently have, and/or are likely in the future to have, the greatest impact.	PEST analysis STEEP analysis SWOT analysis
Execution	The process of putting a plan into action.	Implementation
Evaluation	The process of observing and measuring something for the purpose of judging it and determining its value, either by comparison to similar things, or to a standard.	Assessment
External environment	Aspects outside of the institution to consider in developing and implementing a strategic plan.	Internal environment
Focus group	A qualitative research process designed to elicit opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions from individuals brought together in a group to gain insights and information about a specific topic.	Case study Research study Survey research

| Initiative | A coherent set of activities and/or events established in response to a currently compelling challenge or long-term need, undertaken across multiple institutional units and/or between the institution and community stakeholders/organizations, and directed toward achievement of planned output and/or targeted outcomes at the end of one or more defined time periods. An institutional initiative may consist of a collection of interrelated, finite-duration projects, or may simply represent one large-scale project. The duration is typically substantially longer than that for a standalone project. | Program Project Strategic initiative |
| Input | Ideas, thoughts, and/or information given to decision makers for their consideration in determining the best course of action. | Data informed decision Decision Recommendation |

Non-instructional program	A coherent set of ongoing or cyclically repeated, well-defined, and interrelated activities and/or events that support students and/or employees at the institution. A non-instructional program may serve all students and/or employees, or a distinct subset of the entire student population.	Academic program Program Service
Operating budget	A plan of revenue to be generated and expenditures (or transfers) from that revenue over a finite period of time, such as a fiscal year.	Budget plan
Operational plan	An annual work plan that explains how a strategic plan will be put into operation. An operational plan is the basis for and justifies annual operating budget requests.	Action plan Plan Strategic plan

Program	A coherent set of ongoing or cyclically repeated, well-defined, and interrelated activities and/or events established in response to a new, ongoing need, and directed toward periodic achievement of targeted outcomes. An institutional program maintains a permanent status compared with a project's temporary status.	Academic program Initiative Non-instructional program Program plan Project
Program plan	A product of the program planning process that documents and communicates decisions made during, and actions to be taken subsequent to, the planning process.	Program
Project		

SWOT analysis	A method for examining information collected during environmental scanning, by which factors and trends are categorized into internal and external, and further distinguished into strengths - favorable internal factors, weaknesses - unfavorable internal factors, opportunities - favorable external factors, and threats - unfavorable external factors.	Environmental Scanning PEST Analysis STEEP Analysis
Target	The level of improvement that the institution sets on a specific metric.	Benchmarking Metric
Values	A concise statement, set of statements, or narrative description that outlines an organization's beliefs and guiding principles.	Mission Vision
Vision	A concise statement or more comprehensive description of a future desired organizational state. A compelling, conceptual image of the desired future.	Mission Values