

ACCJC NEWS

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Integrated Planning to Implement College Quality Improvement

Member institutions have been seeking more explanation of the ACCJC's requirement for **Integrated Planning**. Standard I.B.3 requires that institutions "assess progress toward achieving stated goals and make decisions regarding the improvement of institutional effectiveness in an ongoing and systematic cycle of evaluation, **Integrated Planning**, resource allocation, implementation and re-evaluation." While many member colleges have developed sound means of evaluating institutional quality, some still lack the ability to make systemic plans for needed or desired changes, and keep the institution's work focused on implementing those planned changes.

At the simplest level, plans describe the pathway from a current institutional quality, condition, or outcome, to an envisioned quality, condition or outcome at some defined future date. Plans are the promise to change and to do something differently. They require institutional commitments of attention and resources if they are to be achieved. Beset by the requirements of various agencies (e.g., state systems, accreditors, bond or fundraising

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campaigns) for different kinds of plans (strategic planning, tactical planning, enrollment planning, budget planning), institutions often have multiple plans, each targeting some part of institutional behavior but lacking alignment and cohesion to the other plans the institution has developed. Sometimes, the groups of individuals that develop various institutional planning documents are not aware of how their plan will fit with institutional priorities, but are simply hoping the existence of a plan will stimulate the institutional commitment. The result is institution-wide confusion about priorities, competition for institutional resources, and

failure to achieve important changes that the institution has identified as needed or desirable. Another result can be a distain among college constituencies toward both evaluation and planning activities.

When integrating plans and planning processes, a college must have a point in its decision-making process whereby it considers all of its plans, determines how to align them and which ones it will commit to, determines the sequence in which they might best be achieved, sets priorities, and allocates resources and responsibilities to achieve the needed changes by determined dates. Not all change-oriented actions need to be taken at the institutional level - many plans for change can be carried out at a departmental or unit level. Nevertheless, the institution needs to know about and make necessary commitments of resources to all the plans for improvement it has decided to advance. (The example of a new college library that stood empty for years because the institution had not planned to equip it comes to mind here.)

Integrated planning is neither top-down nor bottom-up; it is an interactive process in which an institution, through its governance processes, thoughtfully uses its values and vision to set priorities and deploy its resources and energies to achieve institutional changes and improvements at various levels of the organization in response to current or anticipated conditions. When institutions take a holistic, integrated approach to planning, they can find opportunities to combine and leverage plans, maximize effective use of resources as well as create more effective sequences for making changes. They may also find contradictions that need resolution - sometimes by the re-formulation or abandonment of some of the plans that were made. Actions determined through integrated planning bring the purpose of program review and evaluation alive and enable an institution to improve educational quality. ♦