

7.1

Institutional planning

Planning and collegial governance

Planning involves assessing the state of the institution (or a component of it) and making decisions, in light of the institution's academic mission, for its continuing operation and development. Thus, planning is an essential part of governance. Plans either directly concern or may have indirect implications for the academic affairs of the institution – see the appendix below for a list of considerations.

Principles of collegiality require that academic staff are meaningfully involved in planning processes that affect the conditions of academic work. Principles of collegial governance require that governance bodies, including the senate, play the decisive role in initiating and overseeing planning efforts, approving plans, monitoring implementation, and assessing success.

Academic staff and their associations may view planning processes with skepticism due to a history of false consultations, unsatisfactory outcomes, or the abandonment of goals in earlier plans. They should therefore approach these processes cautiously and critically, while recognizing that planning discussions provide an opportunity, within and beyond governance settings, to build awareness of institutional challenges, articulate a positive vision, and organize to collectively press for improvements.

The nature of planning

Planning is an intentional approach to guiding the development of the institution, best undertaken as a reflexive process that:

- is founded on an understanding of the primacy of the academic mission (for example, teaching, scholarship and community engagement in the public interest) as carried out through the work of the institution's community of scholarly practice
- considers the (possibly changing) internal and external conditions in which the institution operates
- considers the challenges and choices before the institution

Thus, an understanding of the nature of academic work and a commitment to fostering conditions that facilitate it are crucial to the long-term success of any planning initiative. The association should foster regular discussion among its members about these issues, including outside of formal institutional planning cycles and well before planning initiatives are launched.

Based on a careful examination of the present situation and its historical development, a plan will articulate a future vision for the institution, to be realized over a stated period, together with the chosen developmental pathway intended to achieve this vision. A plan will often contain an explicit set of priorities and goals accompanied by indicators of success expressed in quantitative or qualitative terms. Plans should clearly describe the challenges that initiatives are designed to address and the implications of pursuing them in the way proposed so that members of governance bodies are able to make fully informed approval decisions.

To be meaningful, a description of how the institution will organize itself to achieve the intended results should accompany a plan. This description should assign responsibility for the implementation of plan elements. Assignments should be to offices with the necessary authority. Sufficient resource allocation commitments should accompany any such plans. Commitments for periodic reporting to the approving governance bodies should be included.

Institutional planning often privileges growth. Although growth may be appropriate in some circumstances, it should be approached carefully and with sufficient justification. Whether or not growth is contemplated, attention must always be directed to maintaining or improving the conditions of academic work.

Between planning initiatives

It is important to remember that administrations may pursue “strategy” that is not captured in approved plans. This can occur through budgeting processes, the use of reserve funds, administrative hiring or restructuring, the use of consultants, etc. Academic governance bodies must be supported in monitoring such activities, including when they deviate from and develop independently from the plans that academic governance bodies have approved.

Academic staff association role

The academic staff association can play a vital role in fostering better institutional planning. This includes through:

- regularly reviewing and analyzing institutional data to monitor and elucidate issues and trends
- continually fostering discussion among members about the institution, the nature of academic work, and the conditions that facilitate this work

- educating members about the important role that the senate and others should play in planning, monitoring plan implementation, and assessing success
- approaching planning processes cautiously and critically, while recognizing that they provide an opportunity for the association to build awareness of institutional challenges, articulate a positive vision, and organize members to press collectively for improvements

Checklists

Regarding the academic staff association

The academic staff association has organized itself to strengthen and support the voice of its members in planning processes:

- The association regularly gathers, reviews and analyzes institutional data to monitor and elucidate issues and trends
- The association monitors the implementation of previously approved plans, including the quality of reporting to governance bodies and the university community
- The association communicates with its members about issues and trends, listens to member concerns, and develops and maintains information and educational resources about the issues and the senate's role in these matters
- The association has developed and proactively maintains a positive, member-endorsed vision for the institution, as well as a set of positions on key challenges
- The association has adopted a member organizing strategy that includes (but is not limited to) organizing members around governance, including planning
- The association anticipates planning initiatives (for example, as the expiry years of earlier plans approach or following major events, such a change in administration)
- Through an organized membership and the provisions of the collective agreement, the association can require that academic staff will be meaningfully engaged in planning processes and that governance bodies, including the senate, will play the decisive role in initiating and overseeing planning efforts, approving plans, monitoring implementation, and assessing success

- The collective agreement secures rights to collegial participation, and these rights are reinforced through rights to academic freedom, rights to equity, and fair workload provisions that support members in delivering their share of the service load¹

Prior to and during planning processes, and following plan approvals, the academic staff association considers:

- possible implications for members' working conditions
- possible areas of conflict with the collective agreement
- possible implications for subsequent rounds of collective bargaining and member organizing

Regarding the planning process

- Institutional policy and collective agreements require that institutions and their administrations are clear about when planning processes are expected to be initiated.
- Governance bodies, including the senate, play the decisive role in initiating planning efforts. Any planning steering committee is struck by and accountable to the appropriate governance body (for example, by the senate for institutional academic planning; in the case of an overarching institutional plan, the steering committee should be a joint committee of the board and senate). If a steering committee is to be struck:
 - Academic staff representation is strong, with representatives elected by the relevant governance bodies following an open nomination process (that is, not selected by administration). Where it is appropriate for committees to include members with certain expertise, the relevant governance bodies should nevertheless retain the authority to select the committee's members (for example, by appointing members of the academic staff with the needed expertise).
 - The committee reflects the diversity of the academic community at the institution, all members have full and equal rights of participation, and barriers to equitable participation have been identified and removed.
 - Rules governing the conduct of committee business (for example, quorum, decision-making, etc.) are clearly established.

- The role of external consultants, if any, is clearly defined, limited and decided by the relevant governance body.² No consultant has been hired prior to the planning process being initiated by the relevant governance bodies.
- The relevant governance bodies are responsible for overseeing planning efforts as they unfold. These bodies receive regular reports (for example, from a steering committee with delegated authority) and can give additional direction as necessary. These bodies and their committees receive drafts of plans and have ample opportunity to discuss them well before the approval stage.
- The planning process is clearly described from the outset, with all academic planning and academic policy development conducted under the authority of the senate and all others subject to consideration by the senate for possible recommendations to the board. The process is open and democratic, and the planning effort is appropriately resourced.

The planning process begins not only with an “external scan” of the institutional context,³ but also a thorough internal examination that includes matters such as:

- workload
- staff complement
- research capacity
- student and staff supports (both academic and non-academic support)
- the library
- professional development
- the quality of the working and learning environment (for example, concerning issues of occupational health and safety, decolonization and equity)
- other matters related to the conditions of academic work
- Results are reported to the relevant governance bodies and to the institutional community. These bodies can request reports and are involved in framing the key issues that are to be addressed through the planning initiative.⁴
- A planning process affords sufficient opportunity to consider a wide array of possibilities before committing to pathways.
- A planning process is collegial, including that it allows for widespread and meaningful community engagement and the expression of a diversity of views and opinions and is inclusive in terms of participation.

Regarding plan elements

A finished plan contains:

- A clear statement of scope, including the lifespan of the plan.
- A clear assessment of present internal and external conditions, as well as the issues that the plan aims to address.
- A clearly articulated vision (possibly accompanied by goals and indicators), together with a developmental pathway for achieving it. All initiatives identified should be described in sufficient detail to give readers a clear understanding of the nature of each initiative, the challenges and opportunities that each is meant to address, etc.
- Clear statements about how the institution will organize itself to realize the plan, including commitments for resource allocation.
- Clear statements of responsibility for implementation of plan elements, assigned to offices with the necessary authority and with reporting requirements to the relevant governance bodies.
- A clear statement about interim and final implementation reviews, with timelines and responsibilities assigned and with reporting requirements to the relevant governance bodies. Reports are scheduled such that they can inform subsequent planning initiatives.
- Clear statements that, should the plan call for the development of subordinate plans, frameworks, targets, etc., these will be developed and approved through appropriate governance processes;
- Clear statements about how the plan relates to any other extant plans or initiatives, as appropriate.
- A finished plan addresses the need to establish and/or maintain the conditions that support faculty and staff in providing a high-quality teaching and learning environment and in conducting scholarship.
- A finished plan is consistent with and upholds core principles of academic freedom, equity and collegial governance.
- A finished plan is flexible and allows for adjustment, subject to governance oversight and approval, as warranted by changing conditions and by experiences throughout implementation.

- Where growth is contemplated, the implications have been thoroughly considered and addressed.

Appendix: Types of plans

The constellation of plans varies by institution and may change over time. They are often arranged in a hierarchy, with lower-level or more detailed plans fitting within an institutional plan framework. Common types of plans include but are not limited to:

- **Institutional plans:** These are overarching plans that contain both academic and non-academic elements. Other plans are expected to fit within the framework established by an institutional plan.
- **Academic plans:** These plans describe the intended evolution of program offerings, the development of organizational units (for example, the creation of new faculties, schools or institutes), targets for student recruitment and enrolment, goals for research and community engagement, etc. They may also address academic and student services, goals for decolonization and equity, and other matters. These and other issues may be elaborated upon in more detailed subordinate or adjacent plans.
- **Budgets:** These include operating budgets and capital budgets. Academic and non-academic staff complement planning may be taken up through the budgeting process. See below for more.
- **Capital plans:** These are plans for campus maintenance, development, new facilities, etc.
- **Decarbonization plans:** These are plans for how the institution will reduce carbon emissions associated with its operation and otherwise contribute to addressing the climate emergency.

Plans either directly concern or may have indirect implications for the conditions of academic work. Relevant matters include but are not limited to:

- Program development
- Enrolments
- Academic and non-academic staff complement planning and workload
- Research capacity and supports
- Student and staff supports (both academic and non-academic support)

- The library
- Professional development
- The quality of the working and learning environment, for example, concerning issues of occupational health and safety, decolonization and equity
- Administrative structures
- Campus development (for example, land and space, buildings, labs, equipment and information technology)

Budgets

A budget is a plan for the allocation of resources, expressed in financial terms. As such, this implies that:

- Considerations that apply to planning in general apply to budgeting in particular
- Institutional budgets (for example, annual operating budgets and capital budgets, as well as the budgets of divisions, faculties, units, etc.) should align with other approved plans, such that resource allocations will support the success of those plans and balance any tensions between or inherent within them

The contents of this institutional planning resource should be read as applying also to budgeting. However, because of its central role and the level of detail involved, institutional budgeting is addressed further in the **Institutional Budgeting** resource of the CAUT **Governance Library**.

Strategic planning

Within the corporatized institution, where efforts draw on planning terminology from the private sector, plans are often characterized as “strategic.” This approach is founded, sometimes implicitly, on the view that the most fundamental goal of planning is to ensure the institution’s viability and especially its competitiveness (for example, regional or global market share, research dollars, etc.) relative to other institutions and in the face of other external conditions (for example, a limited or changing public funding context).

This approach prioritizes a concern with how the institution aims to position itself within a larger landscape or market. It might therefore result in a greater emphasis being placed on external factors and on the “strategic” imperative to prioritize certain activities in order to improve the institution’s relative position with its environment.

Although the external context is an important one, the “strategic planning” framing might result in less attention being paid to the institution understood as a community of scholarly practice – in other words, less attention to how the institution can be developed such that this community and its scholarly practice flourishes through pursuit of the academic mission.

Academic staff and their associations should be mindful of the degree to which external pressures, for example as applied through provincial performance-based or targeted funding regimes or through growing reliance on private-sector support, are being allowed to drive institutional planning. External pressures such as these threaten institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

Private-sector consultants may be especially likely to promote a corporatized “strategic planning” approach. Academic staff and their associations should engage critically with this framing and underlying assumptions about the purpose of post-secondary education.

Endnotes

1 See the [Policy Statement on Collegiality](#) for more.

2 The routine use of private-sector consulting firms and the influence they exert over critical decisions are inseparable from the corporatization of higher education and the erosion of meaningful academic staff participation in governance. They also divert resources from the institution’s academic mission. For these reasons, the use of consultants should be avoided. However, if the governance body decides to engage a consulting firm after a thorough deliberation that considers the disadvantages and costs, the rationale and selection criteria should be decided by the body prior to a firm being selected. The only role of the consulting firm should be to support the relevant committee at the committee’s direction.

3 External scans often include analyses of population demographics, projected program demand, the public policy and funding context, etc. To the extent that they address perceived societal needs, they may tend to focus narrowly on utilitarian economic demands, such as by employers.

4 It is important that administrators, consultants, etc., are not left to frame the planning exercise and to decide the issues to be addressed.