CHAPTER SIXTEEN

PLANNING
CHAPTER SIXTEEN: PLANNING

I. A Retrospective on Planning at Queens College

Queens College has always engaged in a variety of forms of institutional planning. However, the current, formalized system—centered on the elaboration of five-year plans that make explicit College-wide priorities for action—is relatively new. In large part, it responds to recommendations made by the Middle States Association Evaluation Team in fall 1986 that called for "more overt and careful institutional planning" (Adamy Report, p. 18). In response to that call and soon after assuming the presidency, former President Kenny set up Planning Committees on Recruitment, Admissions, and Retention (October 1986), and then, on January 27, 1987, issued a memo on long-range planning to the College community:¹ that memo began the process by which the current planning structure was put in place. The history of instituting that structure is traceable in the documents that have been exchanged between the College and the Middle States Association reviewers in the ensuing years.²

Following President Kenny's memo of January 1987, ten committees³ were set up to consider various areas of concern to the College as a whole. Some were singled out during the last Middle States Association evaluation as in need of particular attention. Each committee did its work during the spring 1987 semester and prepared a report, presented in 1988 to the President and campus as a whole as "The Reports of the Planning Committees." Comments and proposals were at that point solicited from the whole College community. The College Planning Committee, appointed in March 1988 by President Kenny, then worked with the previous Committees' reports to identify priorities for implementation over the course of the next five years; it submitted its final report, "Recommendations of the College Planning Committee," in October 1988. This report was also then subject to campus-wide scrutiny and suggestions, and the course of its implementation during the years 1988–1993 charted annually in the College's faculty and staff newsletter, FYI.

This planning cycle was coordinated by a new Acting Vice President for Planning. Subsequently the position became permanent with expanded duties as Vice President for

---


³ These ten Planning Committees were: Academic Program and Support Services Review, Affirmative Action, Campus Communications, Computing & Management Systems, Continuing Education & Non-Credit Programs, Curricular Development, Facilities, Faculty Development, Graduate Studies, and Non-Traditional Students.
Campus Affairs, Planning and Information Systems. An analysis of the position as it exists currently may be found in CHAPTER THIRTEEN: ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION.

For the most part, the second planning cycle followed the form of the first. One innovation, however, was the setting up, at the beginning of the second cycle, of a Pre-Planning Committee composed of students, faculty, and administrators, and charged with reviewing progress in implementing the 1988-1993 Five-Year Plan and with identifying particular areas of concern to be considered as part of the new planning cycle (see Pre-Planning Committee for the Five-Year Plan, Final Report). By contrast, all pre-planning work for the 1988-1993 Five-Year Plan was carried out by a committee composed of the College President and vice presidents.

The Pre-Planning Committee came to its proposals following an extensive interviewing and surveying process. As part of that process, members of the campus community were asked for "recommendations for problem identification committees." Though the five Planning Committees actually appointed by President Kenny in 1993 differed somewhat in emphases from those identified as most urgent by the Pre-Planning Committee, the pre-planning work certainly gave the President and planners a strong indication of which areas a variety of members of the College community found most in need of attention in the work of the 1994-1999 planning cycle.

The five committees—Planning Committees on Faculty, Students, Facilities, Computers and Communications, and Outcomes Assessment—met extensively and submitted their reports in 1993-1994. These were discussed in open forums in fall 1993. A 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan Planning Committee then considered those recommendations and the campus response to them in preparing the Recommendations of the 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan (June 1994). These were discussed in open forums in October 1994 and ratified by the Academic Senate. They are currently in their first year of implementation.

In 1993, the University initiated a new planning process, called Academic Program Planning. Prior to that time, campus academic planning interfaced with the central administration primarily through statements of academic goals that accompanied budget planning documents. With the initiation of the Academic Program Planning process, a regular dialogue began between the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and the College on matters of academic priorities. Funds are set aside centrally to support Academic Program Planning initiatives and are distributed annually in response to proposals submitted by the campuses. Review of these proposals provides an opportunity for a discussion of campus and university priorities. These discussions also occur at intervals throughout the year. Additional details on Academic Program Planning will appear later in this chapter (section V).
II. The Successes of the 1988-1993 Five-Year Plan

The 1988-1993 Five-Year Plan made 37 recommendations; 33 (89%) have been successfully implemented and have significantly improved life at the College. Review of academic programs and administrative offices have been instituted on a regular, rotating basis. Major new technological systems have been installed on campus, most notably the QUASAR system that has changed completely (and much for the better) the College's systems for course scheduling, student registration, and student record-keeping. In association with the broader CUNY library system, new on-line catalogs and databases have made information retrieval at the College's Rosenthal Library easier and more efficient. The overall campus need for access to computing facilities and new technologies was recognized in the 1988-1993 Five-Year Plan (and the recommendations of the 1994-1999 Plan push the College even further toward improving such access). Awards for teaching excellence and mini-grants for innovative teaching projects have been instituted in order to emphasize the College's continuing commitment to excellence in instruction. Orientations and a mentoring system for new faculty have been set up to help in the sometimes difficult process of entry into the College community. Significant attention has been paid to increasing the racial, ethnic, and gender diversity of the College's faculty and toward furthering multicultural programs and sensitivity throughout the College. And emphasis has been put on addressing the needs of evening students--to assure that they have access to a variety of offerings and are able to complete their programs of study within a reasonable amount of time.

III. The Failures of the First Five-Year Plan

Despite the many successes of the 1988-1993 Five-Year Plan, there are several areas in which implementation has been incomplete or unsuccessful. Most of these are linked in one way or another to the College's continuing budgetary problems. Thus, for instance, though recommendation #35 of the 1988-1993 Plan proposed the allocation of "greater resources . . . for [library] acquisitions, library services and for extending library hours," in fact, due to a decrease in available OTPS funds and a 13% annual increase in the cost of periodicals and monographs, there has been an overall decrease in new acquisitions of printed material. Similarly, budgetary constraints have impeded the implementation of recommendation #32 of the 1988-1993 Five-Year Plan, which proposed that "priority . . . be given to the improvement of cleaning services and general maintenance of classrooms and other campus facilities." And while recommendation #17 of the 1988-1993 Five-Year Plan called for the reduction of the "excessive size of classes in graduate courses relative to state norms for each discipline," there has been "an overall increase, not a decrease in average class size" due to "drastic budget reductions affecting both full-time and part-time instructional personnel" (FYI October 1993).

Certain proposals from the 1988-1993 Five-Year Plan--for instance, the call, in recommendation #4, "to encourage reading, writing, and oral communication across the curriculum"--have been worked on by the College but are not yet fully instituted. All such
partially implemented recommendations, as well as those whose implementation was prevented by budgetary constraints, were reconsidered by the 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan Committee, and many of these were reiterated as College priorities in the 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan even as somewhat different strategies for their implementation were proposed.

IV. The 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan

Given the general success of the 1988-1993 Five-Year Plan, the various Committees involved in the next round of planning were able to direct their attention away from areas like Academic Program Review, where significant progress had already been made, toward remaining areas of urgent need like student advising and outcomes assessment. Such areas, though they received some attention during the College’s previous round of planning, in 1993 still remained of significant concern to the campus community at large. The success of the 1988-1993 Five-Year Plan in addressing a variety of crucial issues along with the simultaneous identification of new concerns to the College partly explains the narrowing of the initial set of Planning Committees from ten in the initial cycle to five in the following cycle. The creation of a Committee on Outcomes Assessment recognized an issue largely unaddressed by the 1988-1993 Five-Year Plan.

The 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan Committee, reviewing the implementation of the 1988-1993 Five-Year Plan, the new recommendations of the Committees on Faculty, Students, Facilities, Computers and Communications, and Outcomes Assessment, and the campus response to those recommendations, was, in its recommendations, able to target five major goals around which all its more specific proposals were organized (see Recommendations of the 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan, p. 4). The Committee felt that, particularly given the promise of continued budgetary constraint, strongly targeting particular goals, rather than trying to address every issue of possible concern to the campus, would be the most effective way to proceed. The main areas of concern it identified—improving student advising, furthering quality teaching and research, making computer and information technology widely available on campus, implementing a comprehensive plan for maintenance and replacement of facilities and equipment, and instituting meaningful outcomes assessment at the College—were certainly common concerns across the campus, as comments in the open forums of October 1994 made clear. Thus, for instance, in those forums there was much discussion on general issues of student advising, as well as the Committee’s specific recommendations for its improvement (recommendations #1-12), showing that many on campus had already thought hard about the problems of providing adequate advising services to the population of commuter students that the College serves. The kind of open, thoughtful, and creative discussion of advising that obtained in the open forums is encouraging for the prospect of implementing a new, more comprehensive and well articulated student academic advising system at the College over the course of the next five years, the goal at which the 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan’s recommendations on advising aim.
In the first year of implementation of the 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan, it is of course too early to assess how successful the Plan might be in guiding the College. But given the achievements of earlier planning work in helping to chart general directions of movement, and in instituting particular changes like systematic Academic Program Review on campus, one might predict continued success for the system of institutional planning developed and deployed at the College in recent years.

V. Academic Program Planning

In spring 1992, Chancellor W. Ann Reynolds appointed an Advisory Committee on Academic Program Planning. The report of that committee, which was released in December 1992, contained a number of controversial recommendations which were never formally implemented. The report did, however, lead to a Board of Trustees resolution in June 1993 which set in motion the current Academic Program Planning process. The Board resolution called for "continuation, and where needed, initiation or intensification, of campus-based planning, program review, and program development activities...", affirmed "the importance of inter-college collaboration in offering academic programs," and stated that campuses should "regularly review their bulletins and related publications to ensure that all listed programs and courses are actually available to students, with reasonable frequency and according to the terms indicated."

At Queens, the five-year planning and program review processes were already well established. Indeed, the College's program review process was described as exemplary by the Office of Academic Affairs. The College's first Academic Program Planning report, in October 1993, detailed the results of the first five years of program reviews, described seven planning initiatives that were underway or under consideration, and listed several inter-campus initiatives that were either in place or under development.

In the early fall of 1993, the annual financial planning meeting, which in the past had focused totally on budget issues, included a discussion of academic planning and was attended by the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and the Queens College Provost. In November 1993, the College received an allocation of $352,000 in response to its request for funds to support academic planning initiatives. These funds included support for two new faculty hires in interdisciplinary programs (Business and the Liberal Arts, and Journalism) and two new hires in advisement, as well as one-time funds for addressing a shortfall in the library journals budget. Requests for funding for faculty hires in Japanese and Korean and to address shortfalls in the graduate assistant and adjunct budgets were not funded.

The next formal Academic Program Planning report was submitted in May 1994. This report described the use of the funds allocated in the previous November, articulated the College's academic priorities for 1994-95 (faculty hiring, continued expansion of advisement, graduate assistantships, library resources, and computer access), described collaborative efforts with other CUNY colleges, updated the status of academic program
reviews, and described progress on our audit of bulletin listings. The report included also a request for funds to support academic priorities in 1994-95. This report was followed in August by a response from the Vice Chancellor which included detailed information about the College’s 1994-95 Academic Program Planning allocation: $350,000 to support four faculty positions (Accounting, Japanese, Korean, Teaching English as a Second Language), two advising positions, and one-time funds for computer access.

The most recent formal interaction on Academic Program Planning occurred in November 1994 when Vice Chancellor Freeland and University Dean Anne Martin visited the College to meet with President Curtis and Provost Thorpe. In addition to a review of the current status of academic program planning initiatives at the College, this meeting focused on different philosophies regarding prioritization and resource allocation: to what extent should some programs be designated as centers of excellence with concomitant infusion of resources and to what extent should there be an emphasis on maintenance of an excellent broadly-based liberal arts curriculum. Clearly, considering the current fiscal outlook, this issue will become even more central in the coming months and years. As the College considers how to implement deep cuts in its budget, its priorities must be crystal clear. The decisions made now will determine the course of the College for many years to come.

Thus, unlike the time of the last Middle States Association review, Queens College has an ongoing, active, and public institutional planning process. It has had considerable success in engaging the whole campus community—students, faculty, staff and administration—in the consideration of campus needs and problems and in setting priorities for effective action in addressing those needs and problems.

VI. Recommendations and Commendations

There is a general sense on campus that institutional planning has been a positive force for Queens College. Many of the recommendations of the 1988-1993 Five-Year Plan have received strong support across the campus, from students, faculty, staff and administration. And there is a sense—suggested in the tone and content of the recent public forums and in the endorsement of the 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan by the Academic Senate—that the new set of planning recommendations will receive similar support.

There are various important attributes of the current planning process at Queens College that have furthered the success of that process and that should, therefore, be cultivated in future planning efforts. As Queens College currently approaches planning, there is a very wide range of campus input. The various levels of committees—preplanning, planning groups assigned to particular issues (e.g., faculty, students, facilities, outcomes assessment), and a final Planning Committee to set overall priorities—guarantee that many individuals and constituencies are involved in the overall process. In the first cycle of planning, over 100 individuals served on official committees; in the second cycle, the number was approximately 80. Such wide representation ensures that planning takes
into account a broad range of views and experiences from across the College community. In addition, public forums, interviewing of concerned individuals, and the active solicitation of written suggestions (as, for instance, by the Pre-Planning Committee) have allowed for others at the College not directly involved in planning work to share their views with the committees. Such a structure should be preserved in future planning work.

Even greater campus participation might be hoped for, however, during the periods between the actual planning work, that is, when the plans are in the process of being implemented. There is a certain tendency once a Five-Year Plan has been published and publicly discussed for attention to shift away from it. Though those charged with the implementation of the Plans—largely College administrators—have in fact been assiduous in their attention to the Plans' recommendations, those recommendations tend to fade into the background for those not so actively involved in the process of implementation. One possible way of addressing this situation would be to hold a public forum each semester during which progress in implementation of the Plan would be reported to the whole College community. This would make it possible to follow more closely the progress (and impediments) in implementing specific recommendations and to gather campus-wide feedback about that progress. Most members of the Task Force on Planning, however, felt that more frequent public forums are not necessarily the best way to proceed in extending campus involvement with the planning process, since previous forums are not usually attended by as broad a cross-section of the campus as one might wish. While somewhat more frequent forums might be held, the consensus of the Task Force is that it would be more productive to track the planning process and implementation in published material made widely available on campus. Thus, the kind of assessment of implementation that was made for the 1988-1993 Five-Year Plan in the campus publication EXI might be extended to other print media—for instance, student newspapers—and ultimately to electronic media (thus, an on-line bulletin board might be frequently updated with information on implementation of the Five-Year Plan). Therefore,

RECOMMENDATION:  

The College administration should expand efforts to communicate with the Queens College community regarding implementation of the recommendations of the Five Year Plans. Reports should include explanation of progress toward and impediments to achievement of the goals set forth and should provide for regular discussion and re-assessment of the recommendations. <16-1> 

The planning process has been, in the view of the Task Force on Planning, quite successful in bringing imaginative, creative, and practical proposals to the attention of the College community and its various constituent populations. In many areas—minority hiring and retention, student advising, academic program assessment and curricular development, to name but a few—the Five-Year Plans have helped set the broadest agendas of the College. The 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan is particularly significant in presenting a new vision of comprehensive student advising; in making meaningful outcomes assessment a
crucial goal; in proposing a coordinated plan for implementing and maintaining technological innovations on campus; in pushing teaching and research in directions that will involve cross-disciplinary work and connections between the College and the surrounding community; and in recognizing the importance of maintaining the integrity of the College's physical facilities.

As the recommendations in all of these areas also make clear, the planning process has focused attention not just on identifying large or abstract problems and needs that the College must address but also on providing real, practical suggestions for how to approach those problems and needs. For instance, the advising proposals in the 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan do not just present the general sense that student advising needs to be improved, but outline quite specific suggestions for how the College should proceed in seeking that improvement. Already --in the public forums and in the Academic Senate discussion of the Plan--some of these proposals (for instance, recommendation #4 that a credit-bearing orientation course for freshmen be instituted on an experimental basis) have generated considerable controversy. The Task Force on Planning believes that such controversy is healthy in focusing attention on the real need for advising reform and in generating thoughtful and practical ideas for how to implement such reform, even when those ideas would revise or replace certain specific recommendations of the Planning Committees.

In making their recommendations, the Planning Committees have consistently taken into account the feasibility of their proposals--what resistance particular recommendations might meet from constituent populations on campus, what budgetary restraints might potentially block implementation. Such perceived obstacles do not necessarily stand in the way of proposals that are felt to be particularly important: thus, even though the 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan Committee was aware that money might not be available for full implementation of its proposals on computing technologies, it ultimately decided that pushing for the expansion of such technologies on campus was so crucial a goal that the Plan should outline an ideal situation with respect to such technologies--where Queens College really should be five years from now in access to computing and communications facilities--even if in the end the College might find itself somewhat short of that ideal. At the same time, however, the Committee was careful to make clear its priorities for implementation, so that, should the budget make necessary the putting aside of certain recommendations, those most crucial to the health of the campus would be funded first.

Despite the Planning Committees' acute awareness of practical restraints to ideal plans, and despite their weighing of the ideal against the practical in forwarding recommendations to the College, the articulation of the planning process with the particularly crucial factor of the budget remains less than ideal. In large part, this reflects the complex and always difficult budget process that Queens College participates in as a part of CUNY, funded largely by a state government that does not generally provide budgets in a fashion that would permit long-range planning and subject to budget decisions, at both the state and CUNY levels, that are beyond its control. The 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan Committee did consider "the question of the budget" explicitly in its plan
(Recommendations of the 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan pp. 2-3), but this served mostly to remind the College community of the budgetary obstacles to effective planning and to urge the College "to continue advocating its interests with state and city funding sources." In the interest of integrating the recommendations of five-year plans with annual budgeting,

RECOMMENDATION: The College administration should increase its efforts to meld long range planning and annual budgeting, while resisting a tendency strictly to limit horizons and vision according to budget. <16-2>

For the institutional planning work done in preparation of the Five-Year Plans, it would be very useful if the College were able to provide at least rough five-year projections of future budgets as well as current budget figures for those programs, operations, and facilities whose futures are under consideration by the various Planning Committees. As the planning process currently works, Committees generally have only rough ideas of such budgetary information and plans are thus not linked to a firm sense of the resources that might be available during the course of the next five years. Of course, given the complexity and changeability of the budget process at Queens College, even the provision of such figures and projections would not give planners a fully reliable idea of what real budgets would look like. But the more tangible evidence of the College's current and future fiscal situation that the Committees might have, the more realistic and useful would be their planning work. In the absence of such evidence, the Task Force on Planning fears that recommendations from the 1988-1993 Five-Year Plan that were not implemented for lack of adequate funding and that have been reiterated in the Second Five-Year Plan will remain wished-for by the College but unrealized.

It should be noted, in the consideration of budgetary concerns, that, during her tenure at the College, former President Kenny regularly used funds from her "reserve" accounts to support initiatives spelled out in the Five-Year Plan. Such strong presidential support for the planning process is crucial, and the Task Force hopes that it will be continued by future administrations. Therefore,

RECOMMENDATION: The College administration should increase the availability of budgetary information to the Planning Committees and continue its strong support for College-wide planning efforts. <16-3>

It is clear that, over the course of the past eight years, institutional planning has become a valued and useful process at Queens College, and there is every reason to believe that, in something very much like its current form, it will continue to help guide the College. There is some evidence, however, that it needs to be even more firmly institutionalized than it has yet been. Despite the large numbers of people who have been involved in the past two formal cycles of planning work, there are those on campus, particularly students, but also faculty and staff, who still have only the vaguest idea of how
the College goes about planning for its future. Therefore,

RECOMMENDATION:  *The College should endeavor to involve the whole campus community in the planning process.*  <16-4>

In addition, the transition from the 1988-1993 Five-Year Plan to the 1994-1999 Plan was somewhat rougher than it might have been. Ideally the 1994-1999 Plan should have picked up immediately where the preceding one left off. Instead, largely because of the difficult logistics of marshalling all the student, faculty, staff and administration participation needed to make the planning process work effectively, and because of the somewhat slower than anticipated progress of the planning work itself, the College finds itself with a year’s gap between these two Five-Year Plans. One way of preventing such gaps in the future would be to begin the “pre-planning” process even earlier than was done for the 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan. Ultimately it was felt that the formal preparation for a new plan need not begin until the beginning of the fourth year of implementation of the current plan—as was the case in making the transition from the 1988-1993 to the 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan. But the timetable for planning does need to be spelled out, and adhered to, more rigorously than was the case in setting the 1994-1999 Five-Year Plan in motion. Therefore,

RECOMMENDATION:  *The President should establish and maintain a strict timetable for the next cycle of institutional planning.*  <16-5>

In developing the timetable, the President may wish to consider the following suggestions:

1) During the fall semester of the fourth year of an ongoing planning cycle, a Pre-Planning Committee should do its work.

2) During the spring semester of that fourth year, Planning Committees assigned to specific areas should meet and make their recommendations.

3) During the fall semester of the fifth year, public hearings on the Planning Committees’ recommendations should be held, and a final Planning Committee, to draft the overall Five-Year Plan, set up.

4) During the spring semester of the fifth year, the Planning Committee should meet and forward its prioritized recommendations to the President.

Setting out, and holding to, such a rigorous timetable would help ensure that the planning process that has clearly been of so much value to Queens College would continue to operate efficiently and thus provide optimal benefits to the campus community at large.
VII. Summary List of Recommendations on Planning

RECOMMENDATION: The College administration should expand efforts to communicate with the Queens College community regarding implementation of the recommendations of the Five Year Plans. Reports should include explanation of progress toward and impediments to achievement of the goals set forth and should provide for regular discussion and re-assessment of the recommendations. <16-1>

RECOMMENDATION: The College administration should increase its efforts to meld long range planning and annual budgeting, while resisting a tendency strictly to limit horizons and vision according to budget. <16-2>

RECOMMENDATION: The College administration should increase the availability of budgetary information to the Planning Committees and continue its strong support for College-wide planning efforts. <16-3>

RECOMMENDATION: The College should endeavor to involve the whole campus community in the planning process. <16-4>

RECOMMENDATION: The President should establish and maintain a strict timetable for the next cycle of institutional planning. <16-5>