Description and Evaluation of UTEP’s Planning System

Introduction

Institutional planning should be ongoing, integrated, institution-wide, and research-based. This continuous improvement process should accomplish the institution’s mission.

This document shows how UTEP’s planning system achieves its mission by 1) documenting our accomplishments in each of our mission areas; 2) describing the ongoing, integrated short- and long-term planning processes on multiple levels that produce continuous improvement; 3) documenting our research activities that inform policy and planning activity; and 4) evaluating our current planning system and identifying actions to improve it.

The Effectiveness of UTEP’s Planning System in Accomplishing Its Mission

Ultimately, the evaluation of a planning system should begin with an assessment of the institution’s achievement of its stated mission. We begin by listing our mission and then describe our achievements under each goal.

The University of Texas at El Paso’s Mission Statement

The University of Texas at El Paso is dedicated to teaching and to the creation, interpretation, application, and dissemination of knowledge. UTEP prepares its students to meet lifelong intellectual, ethical, and career challenges through quality educational programs, excellence in research and in scholarly and artistic production, and innovative student programs and services, which are created by responsive faculty, students, staff, and administrators.

As a member of The University of Texas System, UTEP accepts as its mandate the provision of higher education to the residents of El Paso and the surrounding region. Because of the international and multicultural characteristics of this region, the University provides its students and faculty with distinctive opportunities for learning, teaching, research, artistic endeavors, cultural experiences, and service.

Goal 1 – Learning and Teaching: To prepare UTEP students to meet lifelong intellectual, ethical, and career challenges and to be the leaders of the 21st century.

The National Survey of Student Engagement and the American Association for Higher Education identified UTEP as one of the 20 colleges and universities that was “unusually effective in promoting student success” (Project DEEP Interim Report, p. 1). They noted that “UTEP is a dynamic, distinctive institution of higher education. By a number of measures, UTEP is a national leader . . . institutional slogans such as “two languages, two cultures, unlimited opportunities……a “Model Institution for Excellence” are by no means empty rhetoric….Honoring its commitment to the El Paso region, the University has
strategically capitalized on converting its location and regional culture into a living laboratory for students.\textsuperscript{1} (p. 5)

- In recognition of our success in creating educational opportunities for non-traditional students, the National Science Foundation designated UTEP as a Model Institution for Excellence, one of only six in the Country.

**Goal 2 – Research, Scholarship and Artistic Production:** To create, interpret, evaluate, apply, and disseminate knowledge; to encourage the addition of perspectives based on UTEP's geographic and social setting; and to contribute to the formation of a broader intellectual and artistic foundation for the 21st century.

- In a recent report prepared for The UT System by the Washington Advisory Group, WAG consultants noted that UTEP has achieved national "research prominence," adding that we've had "remarkable success" in expanding research programs and attracting federal funding over the past 15 years.

**Goal 3 – Public Service:** To work in partnership with public and private agencies, institutions and organizations, including business and industry, to improve the quality of life in our region and world by providing appropriate University expertise and leadership.

- UTEP's Center for Civic Engagement provides an institutional framework for developing, fostering, and evaluating public service\textsuperscript{2} activities of the Campus.

- UTEP has received national acclaim for its public service. An example is the El Paso Collaborative for Academic Excellence. The Collaborative, formed in 1991, is recognized as one of the most innovative and effective education reform initiatives in Texas and the nation\textsuperscript{3}. The Collaborative is a community-wide partnership designed to raise educational standards and student test scores in public schools toward assuring academic success for every youngster in the region. The Collaborative is a multi-faceted effort, which includes a reexamination of the entire system--from kindergarten through university levels--to address policy changes, higher standards, resource leveraging, management restructuring, learning infrastructure changes, assessment aligned with instruction and national standards, data utilization to inform policy discussion and school level strategies, and use of resources and environments outside the school. The founders and partners include the National Science Foundation, the U.S. Department of Education and The Pew Charitable Trusts, in addition to

\begin{itemize}
\item UTEP was selected as one of the 20 institutions to be profiled in the 2004 NSSE report, titled, Final Report: University of Texas at El Paso and in a follow-up book, Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter.
\item See for example, Staudt and Brenner’s (2000) Higher Education Engages with the Community: New Policies and Inevitable Political Complexities
\end{itemize}
other community organizations. The accomplishments of the Collaborative Project are significant: El Paso's students are staying in school; El Paso's graduating seniors are receiving a higher-quality education; achievement gaps are closing fast; student expectations are higher.

**Goal 4 – Administration:** To support the achievement of UTEP’s mission in learning, teaching, research, scholarship, artistic production, and public service through responsive, effective, and efficient administrative and staff services.

UTEP’s rise in national stature has taken place in the context of declining legislative appropriations. UTEP’s accomplishments in increasing student success, research, and service in the context of regional mission and declining resources are documented in the following Powerpoint: ([UTEP: A University on the Move](#)).

These major accomplishments reflect the efficacy of UTEP’s planning system. But it is important to recognize that the key element in achieving these goals is not the formal features of the planning processes, but, rather, it is the effectiveness of the vision and strategies of the President and other senior administrators who engage in the planning process. That is, the institutional outcomes are a function of the planning system and planners (decision makers) who work within it.

In the next section, we outline UTEP’s formal planning system. We begin by describing the general planning process, and then focus on the short- and long-term processes. The final section describes the limitations of the current planning system and proposes steps to improve the process and the efficacy of planned actions.

**The General Planning Model**

The higher education planning context is complex. There are many different levels and types of planning that take place within this system, but all planning systems follow the same planning framework—generally identified as the rational planning framework by planning theorists. Figure 1 describes the elements of the general planning model.

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4 This point does not minimize the role of faculty and staff who have a significant role in developing and implementing plans, but the President and senior administrators shape institutional strategies that inform these unit and subunit plans.
The critical insight that should emerge from Figure 1 is that all planned actions are shaped by mission, vision, and resources. Thus, the expected outcomes (and the associated strategies) should also be evaluated within the context of the institution’s mission, vision, and resources.\(^5\) The feedback loop (or evaluation link) between outcomes, strategies, and goals reflects a common element of planning within a complex environment. Planned actions (related to specific strategies) are based on limited knowledge about the conditions and factors that will produce desired outcomes. Our evaluation of outcomes enhances our knowledge about the environment and strategies, but the effectiveness of a formal continuous-improvement loop should not be overstated. The higher education planning context is very complex and dynamic, where the competition for limited resources and status is intense, and, in this context, the effectiveness of planning is determined by the ability of the key decision makers (planners) to use information and respond quickly to the changing environment. The critical factor in the effectiveness of the planning system is knowledge about the environment and strategies used to achieve desired goals. The President and senior administrators build knowledge based on data and other insights. Thus, the role of Institutional Research offices is to provide data and to confirm, through research, the insights (read as knowledge) developed by key decision makers. Therefore, the timeliness and accuracy of data and analysis are far more critical than the formal nature of the planning process. The next section describes UTEP’s formal planning system.

\(^5\) While this seems to be an obvious point, it is not always the case. For example, see UTEP’s analysis about Education Trust’s Project on graduation rates.
There is a strong tradition of formal planning at UTEP; these planning efforts are shaped by UT System mandates and internal needs. But listing planning activities does not adequately capture the multiple layers and levels of planning that take place within the institution; an institution’s formal planning system is more elaborate. Figure 2 shows a simplified representation of the UTEP planning system.

The above graphic shows the major planning activities over a ten-year planning period. The important point is that there are multiple levels (system, institution, units, colleges, departments), timelines (short-term and long-term), and planning activities (e.g. budget, compact, program, instructional) that make up the complex planning system. We review these planning activities within the context of short-term (1-2 years) and long-term (5-10 years) planning cycles.
Long-Term Planning: Strategic Thinking and Planning

UTEP’s mission and vision are established through a long-range planning process. The major elements of long-range planning are environmental scan, strategic thinking, and strategic planning. Each of these distinctive processes is critical to establishing mission, vision, and goals. Figure 3 describes the link between these distinctive processes.

Environmental Scan:
External & Internal

Strategic Thinking:
Restatement of Mission and Vision

Strategic Planning:
Development of Long-Range Plans, based on Mission and Vision

Elements of Long Range Planning
Figure 3

The environmental scan is an exploration of the changes that provide new challenges and opportunities for the institution. Generally, this type of scan is undertaken by institutional decision makers (using the SWOT - Strengths, Weakness, Opportunity, Threats - Framework), but this internal analysis is incomplete because the insights are limited by organizational strictures. It is more effective to develop an external / internal group to scan the environment. UTEP used the UT El Paso 2001 Commission (1988 - 1989) to scan the environment, and insights that emerged from this analysis shaped the current mission and vision of the institution. The current activities of the Centennial Commission will help shape the mission and vision for the next decade. In particular, the insights and ideas generated by the Centennial Commission will shape the new mission and vision of the institution. Once a new mission and vision are in place, the strategic planning process can begin. In particular, the mission and vision will inform the

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6 The most recent strategic plan (Agency plan) builds on the insights that were gained from the 2001 Commission Report. There are also other types of long-range planning that take place at different levels. 7 In addition to the Institution’s Strategic Plan, there are other issue-based long-range plans (e.g. Master Plan, IT Strategic Plan, Research Strategic Plan, and Strategic Enrollment Plan). All of these plans will inform the institutional strategic plan.
institutions’ goals, priorities, and strategies, and they will also provide insights about appropriate principles that should guide future action.

Evaluating Outcomes

In complex environments, it is appropriate to evaluate only the broad mission and goals outlined in a strategic plan. It is not very useful to evaluate specific outcomes associated with major goals in the Strategic Plan because the objectives, strategies, and tactics are adjusted from year to year. The important point is that the Strategic Plan serves as a preliminary guidance document, and its content is adjusted from year to year based on evaluation of outcomes. These changes are reflected in the annual planning process. Ultimately, the strategic planning document establishes the mission and goals, and its primary function is to promulgate the mission and goals to the campus. Therefore, the evaluation of outcome measures should focus on goals, strategies, and outcomes in the annual plan.

It should also be clear that the institution’s goals and priorities are shaped by region, system, state, and national conditions. Figure 4 provides a graphical explanation of these relationships. The implication of the graphic is that the outcomes assessment must take place within the planning context that produced the mission, vision, goals, and strategies. This is a critical point, in that the outcomes can rarely be evaluated using peer institutions.

8 The mission and broad goals remain the same. That is, the institution’s purpose, focus, values, principles, and broad goals remain stable, but the objectives, strategies, and tactics change as environmental conditions change.

9 As an example, the objectives, strategies, and outcome measures in the UTEP 2005-2006 Compact was modified to address internal and external environmental changes. The Compact Analysis matrix shows the major changes in objectives and progress measures between 2004-2005 and 2005-2006 Compacts.

10 The State’s Higher Education Accountability System provides an effective example of how context matters from one institution to another.
Short-Term Planning

The mission, vision, and goals articulated in the Strategic Plan are implemented in annual plans. The annual plan outlines the major institutional priorities, strategies, and outcomes. The Compact process is the backbone of UTEP’s annual planning process, but there are other many other planning efforts (program planning, budget planning, instructional planning) that shape the annual plans. Figure 5 describes the compact process and time.
Figure 5 describes the levels of planning (department, college, unit, campus, system) and how they link into the planning framework. Ideally, the annual planning process should seamlessly integrate the other types of annual planning activity (program planning, instructional planning, and operational planning). It should be clear that all of the elements in the subunit and unit plans will not merge into the institutional Compact, but the institutional outcomes will be shaped by planning (actions and outcomes) at the lower levels. Thus, when these planning activities are effectively integrated, we would expect the annual plans to be aligned with department and unit plans, and, as such, senior administrators can modify outcomes by making policy adjustments that affect planned activity in each of these areas. On the other hand, if there isn’t sufficient alignment, it is difficult for decision makers to understand factors that cause changes in the outcome and to shape policy that will affect outcomes. Thus, there are two levels and two types of evaluation: evaluation of planning systems analysis and outcomes, at both institutional and lower levels.
Institutional Level Analysis

SYSTEM ANALYSIS

The focus of system analysis is to evaluate the integration and alignment of unit level plans to the institutional plan, and to evaluate the status of outcome measures in the institutional plan. This type of analysis provides senior leaders with better understanding about alignment, scope of work, and outcomes for each unit. This analysis should show that there is significant alignment between the institution plans and unit plans.11

OUTCOMES ANALYSIS

The analysis of outcomes provides insights about the effectiveness of current strategies. The review of this year’s outcomes resulted in a major reorganization of priorities and outcome measures in the 2005-2006 Compact.

There are many other operational measures that the institution needs to monitor. The State Accountability Report and UT System’s Accountability Report also provide updates about other operational measures. Each of these outcome measures are analyzed by CIERP and the President and other senior administrators.12

Other operational measures (related to federal and state reports) are also collected and evaluated. The Center analyzes the data in these reports and provides periodic reports to critical decision makers on Campus.13

The evaluation of system and outcomes allows us to determine if the inability to achieve goals is caused by system (lack of alignment, inadequate planning system, resources) or structural (inadequate strategy, knowledge) problems.

Unit and Subunit Levels

Planning at the unit (Vice President level) and subunit levels (e.g., colleges, departments) takes different forms (compact plan, strategic plan, program review, operational plan, budget plan), and all of these planning processes are consistent with the rational planning framework.

11 This year the major focus of the Compact process was to align institutional plans with Compact Plans. The system analysis at the end of the year showed that there was sufficient alignment between institutional plans and compact plans.
12 Each outcome measure is evaluated to ensure that process is being made, and some measures are compared to peer institutions to determine if UTEP’s strategies are sufficiently effective.
13 For example, CIERP analyzes measures from Coordinating Board reports concerning students, faculty, courses, classes, building use, graduation, and admissions. This analysis is shared with senior administrators and is part of the CB Report certification process.
The individual units undertake the following types of planning (and evaluation) activities:

**Academic Affairs:**
- Unit Compact Planning and Evaluation
- College and Department Compact Planning and Evaluation
- Program Planning and Evaluation\(^{14}\)
- College and Program Self Studies for Accreditation
- Instructional Planning and Evaluation
- Budget Planning\(^{15}\)

**Finance and Administration**
- Unit Compact Planning and Evaluation
- Unit Level Strategic Plan (annual evaluation and update)
- Subunit Strategic Plan (annual evaluation and update)
- Budget Planning

**Institutional Advancement**
- Unit Compact Planning and Evaluation
- Subunit Level Compact Planning and Evaluation
- Budget Planning

**Student Affairs**
- Unit Compact Planning and Evaluation
- Subunit Level Compact Planning and Evaluation
- Budget Planning

**Information Resources and Planning**
- Unit Compact Planning and Evaluation
- Subunit Compact Planning and Evaluation
- Budget Planning

**Systems and Outcomes Analysis at Unit and Subunit Levels**

This year’s compact process facilitated the alignment of unit compacts to the institutional compact. Given the bottom-up feature of the process, it is expected that subunit compacts are aligned with unit compacts, but the extent of alignment is unclear at this time. As part of the 2005 Compact planning process, the Vice President for Information Resources and Planning developed an effective framework to ensure alignment. This framework will be introduced to the Campus during a series of planned Compact Update

\(^{14}\) During each academic year beginning with 1999-2000 and ending with 2003-2004, the Program Planning Format served as the systematic framework for annual review and improvement for all academic programs. In 2003-2004, the Compact became the official annual planning document for the UT System, and the Program Planning activity was integrated within the Compact process. Program planning data outlined in document continues to be provided to all academic departments, and principles outlined in the program planning framework continue shape planning and evaluation at the department level.

\(^{15}\) The Vice President for Finance and Administration and the Budget office has made an effort to align the annual budgeting process with Compact process. The FY 2005-2006 Budget Instructions require units to link additional resource requests to priorities outlined in the Institutional Compact.
meetings with Vice Presidents (during late summer) and other campus administrators (Administrative Forum in early Fall).

UTEP has several offices that provide support, resources, and data for outcomes assessment at the unit level (CIERP, Instructional Support services, Center for Effective Teaching and Learning, Office of the Provost, Auditing and Consulting Services, Information Technology). Vice Presidents are responsible for ensuring the continuous improvement in their respective units.  

UTEP places extraordinary attention on instructional planning and assessment. The majority of UTEP students are minority, first-generation, low-income college students.

Kuh et. Al. (2005) observed that UTEP is “steadfast in its approach to develop a comprehensive approach to improving undergraduate education…” (p. 68). “In addition to closely monitoring its persistence and graduation rates, UTEP is systematically assessing the quality of its various University Colleges and related student success initiative” (p. 135).

Each college and department is responsible for planning and evaluating curriculum and courses and the associated student learning outcomes. These planning and evaluation efforts are supported by CETaL, ISS, CIERP, and the Office of the Provost.

Research-based Planning - Building Institutional Knowledge to Effect Change

In addition to the evaluation activity (knowledge building) that takes place at the unit and subunit levels, The Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research, and Planning undertakes research (to build knowledge) in areas that concern multiple units or the entire institution. The major areas of institutional research are student transition to college, student success, and institutional effectiveness.

Student Transition to College

El Paso has the fifth-lowest per-capita income among metropolitan areas in the country; 82.2% of residents in the El Paso region are Hispanic, and only 16.6% of persons over age 25 have a bachelor’s degree. The majority of UTEP’s students are first-generation college students. As an institution whose mission is to provide access to the students of the region, UTEP faces a major challenge in transitioning students to academic life.

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16 The President provides feedback about progress, strategies, and outcomes to Vice Presidents, based on the analysis of institutional outcomes.
18 Each department’s website lists its program goals, outcomes, and methods of assessment.
19 CIERP administers NSSE Surveys, Campus Experience Surveys, Freshman Survey, Graduating Senior Surveys and Leavers Survey. Several of these surveys explicitly address student learning questions. The data from these surveys are distributed to all academic departments and relevant units.
20 The planning and evaluation efforts related to student transition and student success issues have been extensive. The 2002 Institutional Strategic Enrollment Management Plan describes planning and evaluation activities in detail and also includes data that was used in the planning and evaluation process.
Concern for improving first-year student retention and academic success resulted in the creation of the University College and Entering Student Program. These initiatives focus on strong and visible support during the first year of a student’s enrollment, providing support to ensure student success in his or her academic endeavors. Further efforts to ensure a successful start at UTEP resulted in the development of University 1301, a 3-credit hour course designed to engage first-year students, strengthen academic performance and enhance academic skills. The impact of these efforts has been significant. First-year retention rates have improved and a nationally administered survey, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has found that UTEP’s first-year students exceed expectations on three measures of institutional effectiveness found to be related to student learning. These three measures include active and collaborative learning, student interactions with faculty, and a supportive campus environment.

Given the regional demographics, it is not surprising that UTEP has one of the largest proportional-expenditures in developmental education. To ensure success for all students, UTEP has focused on improving the effectiveness of placement tests and remedial courses through a careful analysis of placement test-score validity and teaching effectiveness. One significant measure of our success is the retention of “at risk” students after the first year; UTEP’s rate is 61%, which is very high for an institution that is not selective.

Research has confirmed that partnerships between UTEP and El Paso Community College (EPCC), and UTEP and local area school districts and high schools are instrumental in addressing the academic preparation of students entering UTEP. The Center’s staff, working with school district administrators, campus administrators, and teachers, developed high school reports to provide feedback to schools about their students who enter UTEP.

Student transition continues to be a major area of concern. Currently, UTEP is exploring new relationships with El Paso Community College in order to establish a more effective distribution of responsibility for addressing needs of under-prepared students. But the notion of “under-prepared” and “at risk” students is not fully conceptualized in literature or practice. The current research shows that that placement scores only explain approximately 20% of the likelihood of a student’s success in a math course (development and others). Our current research focuses on identifying other key factors that determine the success of students in math courses. Currently, the Center is also analyzing data on community college transfer students to better understand factors related to successful transitioning of these students.

Student Success

UTEP’s research and efforts have focused on improving student progression and graduation rates. UTEP graduation and retention rates have continued to increase, and, in many cases, UTEP exceeds the graduation rate predicted by student success models, but we are committed to improving the graduation and retention rates. There are a significant number of projects underway to study and improve student success (RISE, LSAMP, NSSE, Latino Success Initiative). All of these projects are expected to yield additional insights. The institution will also
use the QEP to initiate a campus-wide research project to understand and improve student success at college and department levels. This is a major shift in research—from identifying patterns at the campus-level to focusing on patterns at the subunit levels (department and college).

Administrative Effectiveness

CIERP was established to improve institutional effectiveness by formalizing the planning process (including research and evaluation) on the campus. The Center has facilitated the planning process by developing planning frameworks, facilitating data collection, analysis, and dissemination of information to the campus, and undertaking and supporting research. These efforts will continue, and, in addition, CIERP will focus on improving the planning system and formalizing the procedures of planning. Research efforts will be focused on identifying appropriate systems and processes for UTEP. The next section discusses these efforts in greater detail.

Improving UTEP’s Planning System: Next Steps

UTEP is an institution that has been recognized for its extraordinary accomplishment, but, at the same time, it is clear the increased competition and other changes in the environment will require UTEP to be even more effective in the future. In this context, it is clear that UTEP’s planning system must be improved and adjusted to meet the changing demands. Based on the assessment of the planning system, the following next steps will be taken to address these issues.

- **Integration of short-term planning processes (more effectively linking budget planning and program planning with compact planning)**

  The link between budgeting and annual plans can be improved. The tension in the system is caused by a mismatch of planning principles. The dominant principle in budgeting, at this time, is incremental planning – that is, the emphasis is on ensuring that new resources are rationally distributed, but planning activity is based on the principle of comprehensive planning, where all aspects of the unit are evaluated and adjusted based on emerging conditions and resources. This mismatch between the budgeting and planning approaches makes it difficult for the institution and units to adjust resources to meet both long-term and short-term shifts in priorities. In contrast, a more comprehensive budget planning approach (e.g., Responsibility Centered Budgeting) provides a more effective framework to link expenditures to unit planning. Within this framework, each unit will be able to adjust plans based on resources they generate and control. This type of integrated, decentralized approach will allow programs to evaluate resource allocation strategies and to make adjustments more quickly and efficiently.

  The Provost has begun the process of decentralizing the resource allocation process. The Center will work with the Provost office to identify, evaluate, and develop a workable, integrated planning framework for UTEP.
• **Quicker access to outcome data**

There are many different sources of data that can be used for decision making, but decision makers have a difficult time accessing data in consistent and relevant formats. Currently, deans, directors, and department heads can get data from multiple sources, including CIERP, IT, Academic Affairs, Financial Affairs, and other administrative units. But the ad hoc approach of collecting and using data makes analysis and evaluation across units very challenging. Providing relevant and timely data through an easily accessible and consistent format will improve the effectiveness of the planning process.

The Center and IT will purchase or develop the tools necessary to access timely and consistent data.

• **Provide tools to evaluate planning (to determine if issues are related to action or strategy)**

Current planning efforts are effective, but the process can be improved by formalizing and standardizing planning at all levels. The critical factor is to ensure that procedural aspects of planning do not mitigate the substantive (albeit, less formal) planning that currently takes place within the system.

The Center will work with IT to develop standard planning templates to facilitate planning and evaluation. In particular, the Center will develop electronic formats that allow campus units to develop, evaluate, and modify plans.

• **Foster social learning**

Creating an open planning system (where information can be shared between planners) will improve the effectiveness of planning. The Center will create tools and forums where information about planning process, strategies, and tactics can be shared between planners at all levels. This type of open exchange will increase knowledge about substantive and procedural aspects of planning; theorists describe this as the social learning process.

**Final Analysis**

UTEP’s planning system is on-going, integrated, and research-based. UTEP’s significant accomplishments reflect the effectiveness of strategies and the appropriateness of the planning system. But the dynamic and competitive nature of the higher education environment will require planning to be even more effective. Continued enhancement of UTEP’s planning system will produce even greater outcomes for the Campus.