

FACILITATING STRATEGIC PLANNING

ASSESSMENT AND ENHANCING CONSTITUENT
RELATIONS, COMMUNICATIONS, AND LEADERSHIP

PREPARED BY DR. JOHN W. MOORE FOR PENSON
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INTRODUCTION

Under the direction of its president, Dr. George Ross, Central Michigan University launched a strategic planning process at the beginning of the 2011-2012 academic year. Dr. Sal Rinella of Penson Associates, Inc. was retained as an adviser to the participants in the process. The strategic planning process progressed productively after its initial start but concerns have been expressed about the process' future effectiveness. Specifically, concerns emerged as a result of dysfunctions in campus constituent relationships that occurred during negotiation of the University's collective bargaining agreement with the CMU Faculty Association. In December 2011, the University's Academic Senate passed a resolution of "No Confidence" in the University President, George Ross, and Provost Gary Shapiro. Subsequently several academic departments passed resolutions endorsing the action of the Academic Senate.

In response to these acrimonious conditions and potential adverse implications for the strategic planning process, Dr. Ross conferred with Dr. Rinella, representing Penson Associates, Inc. in his role as adviser to the strategic planning process. It was concluded that the participation of Dr. John W. Moore, President of Penson Associates, Inc. as a facilitator in assessing constituent relationships could be helpful in ensuring a campus climate supportive of the strategic planning process. Dr. Moore conferred with Dr. Ross and arrangements were made for Dr. Moore to visit CMU on February 19-22, 2012.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to communicate findings and advisory suggestions to Dr. Ross and others resulting from Dr. Moore's site visit in February 2012. In addition to studying selected relevant CMU documents prior to his visit, Dr. Moore interviewed approximately forty individuals in person and on the telephone during and subsequent to his campus visit. In addition to President Ross, interviewees represented diverse constituencies such as: the CMU Board of Trustees, vice presidents, academic deans, Academic Senate leaders and members, Faculty Association officers, randomly selected faculty and academic department chairs, Student Government Association leaders, among others.

This report is a summary of this facilitator's (Dr. Moore) cursory observations, findings, and advisory suggestions. This facilitator acknowledges that his review was not an in-depth analysis of campus dynamics and that it was limited by time and scope. This report is intended to offer insights that might be helpful in facilitating the strategic planning process and the over-all effectiveness of campus relationships and leadership.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CAMPUS CONTEXTS

Institutional leadership and processes such as, strategic planning, take place within external and internal campus contexts that have implications for the effectiveness of such processes. In some cases contextual factors can have facilitating and/ or inhibiting effects

This Facilitator has attempted to identify factors in the larger environment, (external to CMU) and within the internal campus environment that might have or had implications for the effectiveness of institutional leadership, constituent relationships, and such processes as: collective bargaining, academic governance, communications, strategic planning, and others. This Facilitator relied heavily on the information derived from campus interviews and selected documents to arrive at his observations.

Several contextual factors were reported as possibly having some bearing on the “breakdown” in constituent relationships during the Fall semester. The factors and perceptions below are included in this report because they were mentioned more than once by more than one person during interviews with this Facilitator. The factors and perceptions are as follows:

- Constrained financial and economic conditions nationally and statewide are perceived as having contributed to a climate of austerity and anxiety resulting in excessive and sometimes aggressive competition among stakeholders for scarce or shrinking resources.
- A national narrative of anti-government, anti- public employees, anti- public employee unions, etc. may be contributing to a negative campus climate of fear and anxiety.
- Some interviewees suggested that the following factors may have contributed to the acrimony that evolved during the Fall semester:
 - The perception that collective bargaining inherently at times can be adversarial (and thus may have contributed to increased conflict between the Faculty Association and the University Administration);
 - the perception that the Administration’s approach to recent contract negotiations shifted from an interest-based to a hard line position-based style of bargaining;
 - the perception that the Academic Senate’s resolution of no confidence was enacted in less than an above board and forthright manner;

- the perception that misunderstandings may have occurred regarding the legitimate authority of the Academic Senate to “instruct” the President and /or Provost regarding activities related to a Board of Trustees’ commitment and priority (e.g. planning for the College of Medicine). (Only the Board of Trustees has the legitimate authority to instruct or direct the President’s administrative agenda);
- the perception that the Administration has not been sufficiently consultative and transparent in such matters as: the financing of the College of Medicine and the Events Center;
- the perception that the recent academic prioritization process was a polarizing activity;
- the perception that the appointment processes for the President and Provost were unconventional and not sufficiently open, consultative, and inclusive;
- the perception that the Administration has not been effective in its communications with campus constituencies, particularly faculty;
- the perception that the student newspaper has not been objective and fair in reporting on internal matters involving the Administration and also may have been inappropriately influenced by some faculty;
- the perception that some faculty have been unprofessional in influencing and involving students in matters being disputed between faculty and the Administration (e.g. resolution of no confidence);
- the perception that President and Provost are not sufficiently “pro-faculty” and are thought to be ineffective advocates for faculty interests; and
- the perception that the President may have been overly engaged in his external responsibilities thereby not being able to devote sufficient time to issues and relationships with internal constituencies, particularly faculty.

NOTE: The above-mentioned factors are perceptions that in a sense represent reality in the minds of some interviewees. (Perceptions often are reality.) It can be reasonably argued, however, that such perceptions may not be supported by factual information. This facilitator was not in a position to research these various perceptions for the purpose of validating their accuracy against historical facts or existing data.

FACILITATOR'S OBSERVATIONS

- Effective executive academic leadership usually is evidenced by indicators of:
 - (1) continuing institutional progress, achievement, and improvement (i.e. outcomes);
 - (2) continuing support of multiple internal and external constituencies (i.e. relationships).

Although this Facilitator did not do an in-depth study of the institution's performance, there appear to be numerous indications that CMU is making positive steps forward. Under President Ross' leadership and through the efforts of dedicated faculty and staff, several selected indicators of progress include :

- CMU has revised its Statement of Mission and Core Values, which has been approved by the Academic Senate and the Board of Trustees;
- CMU has increased undergraduate and graduate enrollment and reached a historic high enrollment in 2011-12;
- In the face of reductions in its State appropriation , CMU has balanced its budget in 2011 and 2012 while also maintaining the lowest combined tuition increases among public universities in the State;
- CMU has completed an extensive academic program prioritization process, and has committed to investing more than \$5 million in strengthening high priority academic programs;
- More than \$1million dollars has been allocated for additional tenure track faculty;
- Student financial aid has increased more than \$6 million during the past two academic years;
- The construction or renovation of the Events Center, University Center, and CMED have been completed;
- The University acquired 90% ownership of Synergy Medical Education in Saginaw at no cost to CMU;
- The Teacher Education Accreditation Council awarded full accreditation to the Teacher Education programs and the CMED received preliminary accreditation;
- The Faculty Center for Innovative Teaching received a national award for its faculty development program.

With regard to "relationships", it was reported to this Facilitator during the interview process that there is strong support for President Ross among many constituencies including: external stakeholders, the Board of Trustees, his administrative colleagues, staff employees, and the elected leadership of the student body. If there is a constituency within which support appears to

have eroded, it is the faculty (particularly among faculty who have leadership roles in the Academic Senate and the Faculty Association).

Given the centrality of the faculty's role in delivering the academic mission, it will be important for both the Administration and faculty leaders to commit to ways to reconcile their differences and to build even more constructive relationships in the future.

The recent acrimony and related dysfunctions in relationships between the Administration and the leaders of faculty union and the Academic Senate should not be taken lightly as they can have a debilitating effect on campus morale and well being. In addition, the University's institutional performance and reputation could be impaired by the public perception of ineffective administrative-faculty relationships.

- It is important to understand the context within which these recent tensions have occurred. Many public universities are confronting challenging times. Diminishing financial resources, expanding public expectations and increasing demands for accountability reflect the evolution of what has been referred to as the "new normal" in American higher education. These dynamics are contributing to increased stress on college campuses that often challenge the credibility of relationships among constituencies. Central Michigan University may well be experiencing the stresses that are associated with the "new normal." How CMU's academic community responds to these challenges could either divide or unite it as it moves into the future.

At colleges and universities coping with the "new normal" a "culture of scarcity" often is experienced. Faced with the reality of diminishing resources internal constituencies often adopt zero-sum mentalities and become particularly suspicious of the process by which resources are allocated to units that they perceive to be their competitors. If a particular organizational entity receives funding it is often perceived to be at some other unit's expense. For example, at CMU the establishment of the College of Medicine is perceived as a strong competitor for scarce resources by some academic departments. It also may be that the College of Medicine is perceived as a change in the historical mission of the University and perhaps a change in funding priorities and potentially in performance expectations for the general faculty.

This analysis seems to suggest that some of the recent acrimony at CMU understandably may have been in response to the "new normal" or a reality characterized by financial austerity and the politics of scarcity.

- “Shared governance” is a core value in American academic institutions (and one not always understood and embraced by external constituencies). Fundamentally it is a process of distributing (i.e. sharing) responsibility, influence, and authority among the institution’s internal constituencies. In this sense, shared governance is inclusive of various entities and should not be thought of as solely the purview of the Academic Senate. In addition to the Academic Senate, the University’s governing board, administration, student government association, and various employee unions play important parts in the University’s diverse governance processes. Ultimately, it should be understood that final responsibility and authority rests with the governing board.

It appears to this Facilitator that discord in the recent collective bargaining process between the Administration and the Faculty Association perhaps was the most significant causal factor to deteriorating campus relationships. The dominant role and influence of the faculty in the Academic Senate also may explain why that governance venue was impacted so adversely by negative fallout from the collective bargaining process and other controversial issues.

CMU now has an opportunity to review and strengthen “shared governance.” In cooperation with the Administration, the Academic Senate has established an ad hoc committee to explore the subject. In order for that process to be productive the full participation of the University’s constituencies and the goodwill of all will be essential.

In addition, the employment agreement between the University and the Faculty Association will be revisited in 2014. Hopefully the leadership of both parties will commit to taking full advantage of that opportunity to bargain collectively in a manner that unites the campus community and contributes to enhancing rather than detracting from the University’s commitment to shared governance.

- Strategic planning also offers an opportunity to reconcile constituent differences and to re-unite the campus community. An effective strategic planning process should do more than provide an advantageous strategic direction and position for CMU, as important as that outcome is to the University’s future. An effective process should provide an opportunity for all constituencies to have their voices heard and to contribute appropriate influence in discussions of CMU’s strategic future.
- Communications to external and internal stakeholders is always an important dimension of academic leadership. To be effective, particularly during turbulent and challenging times, communications must be more than making data and information accessible to the institution’s constituencies.

Effective communications requires a pro-active not a passive approach. Effective communications requires a conscious, purposeful, intentional, and timely effort to inform and interpret data and information about critically important issues to the academic community. Effective communications also is more than “telling” one-side of the story about the issues; it requires a two-way exchange of ideas and a genuine commitment by all parties to hear one another’s voices and to be open to being influenced by the exchange. Effective communications also is about more than transmitting and exchanging information. It is fundamentally about building credible and trusting relationships within the academic community. In this sense effective communications is everyone’s responsibility, Of course, the Administration has a responsibility for fostering an effective communications culture at CMU, but all constituencies must commit communicating credibly with one another.

A discussion of communications at CMU would be incomplete without commentary regarding the role and importance of the student press. Even at a time when multiple communications vehicles are available at CMU, including electronic communications of various kinds, the student press remains a highly visible medium of influence and importance both on and off campus. Given that reality, the reported perceptions that suggest that the student press is not necessarily perceived as having been “fair and balanced” and as being possibly susceptible and vulnerable to inappropriate manipulation, particularly by some faculty, should be of concern to the academic community. Opportunities for students to learn and cultivate their journalistic talents through contributions to the student press are invaluable educational experiences. It should be understood and accepted that faculty and staff charged with the responsibility for teaching, advising, and guiding student journalists have a special responsibility to carry out that charge with the highest of ethical and professional standards.

FACILITATOR’S SUGGESTIONS

Based on the information and feedback elicited during the site visit and other interactions, this facilitator offers the following advisory suggestions.

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

It is suggested that:

- the Board of Trustees, in consultation with President Ross, issue annually a statement of Board priorities to be distributed to important stakeholders, both internal and external, so as to make clear the Board’s expectations of the Administration and others on campus;

- the Board of Trustees articulate and reinforce to the key constituencies the Board's primary responsibility and authority regarding the appointment, direction, evaluation, retention and termination of the President;
- the Board of Trustees articulate its current policies and procedures for reviewing the President's performance and assure appropriate communications about the implementation and results of such;
- the Board of Trustees clarifies the channel of communications that it prefers be utilized by campus constituencies;
- the Board of Trustees use the Trustees-Faculty Liaison Committee as a venue for facilitating improved communications among the Board, the President, and faculty leaders; and
- the Board of Trustees and the President participate in a critical review of the most recent collective bargaining experience with the Faculty Association for the purpose of learning from that experience and formulating an approach to the impending 2014 session that will ensure that a constructive process occurs.

PRESIDENT

It is suggested that:

- the President, in consultation with the Board of Trustees, review his priorities related to both his internal and external role and responsibilities to ensure that an appropriate balance between the two exists. (Given recent tensions on campus, the President may want to allocate more of his personal time to internal matters and relationships);
- the President assess the structure, composition, and leadership styles of his senior administrative team to ensure it is performing at the highest level of effectiveness. Consideration should be given to establishing appropriate performance review procedures for senior administrators;
- the President establish a Planning & Resources Advisory Committee (PPARC) to provide a forum for key stakeholders to advise on matters related to university planning and resources priorities;
- the President establish a President's Council that consists primarily of vice presidents and academic deans (and selected others) to serve as the president's primary administrative advisory body. (the advantage of such a

body is that it facilitates consultation and feedback to the president from an expanded academic perspective);

- the President establish an Administrative Fellows Program for the purpose of providing opportunities for faculty to participate in and contribute to the leadership of the University. (Administrative Fellows are faculty who serve for one to two years in the administration on a released time basis. The program enables the institution to benefit from the experience and expertise of faculty in special areas of importance to the University while bringing a faculty perspective to the administrative process and decision-making); and
- the President assess and enhance the University's communications operation and vehicles, with particular emphasis on communications with internal constituencies.
 - It has been suggested that a more pro-active multi-faceted approach be adopted along with a commitment to more forthcoming and transparent communications especially with regard to institutional finance and budget.
 - In addition, consideration should be given to incorporating regular written up-dates and purposeful forums for the campus community.
 - Consideration should also be given to establishing a university website or Facebook page that could be used as a depository for questions and answers regarding campus issues

ACADEMIC GOVERNANCE

It is suggested that:

- the recently established ad hoc committee on governance and communications conduct its work, preferably with the assistance of advisers expert in academic governance and organizational communications.
- meetings between the President and Academic Senate officers be scheduled regularly and prior to each meeting of the Academic Senate in order to facilitate communications, enhance relationships, and facilitate the effectiveness of shared governance; and
- mini-retreats with the President and Academic Senate officers are held at the beginning and the end of each academic year for the purpose of agreeing on mutual priorities for the coming year and for evaluating the results at the conclusion of the year.

CONSTITUENT RELATIONSHIPS

It is suggested that:

- the President initiate dialog with Academic Senate leaders as to how best to foster more collegial and effective relationships. Consideration should be given to using the services of an external professional to facilitate this process;
- consideration be given to using the Trustees-Faculty Liaison Committee as a venue for facilitating conversation between trustees, the University President, and faculty leaders about matters of mutual interest and concern;
- the President gives attention to ensuring effective and credible relationships with and among internal constituencies, particularly the faculty. (It is noted that the President appears to enjoy the support of the Board of Trustees, his administrative colleagues, student association leaders, and staff employees. On the other hand, relationships with faculty are in need of attention);
- the President continues his efforts to “reach out” to campus constituencies in order to foster and enhance collegial relationships. In the case of faculty the President’s visits to academic departments and units should be continued. In addition an expanded series of luncheons with randomly selected members of the general faculty should be considered. Ways to acknowledge and recognize faculty contributions to CMU should be expanded and enhanced. It would be helpful if the President had similar informal social time with staff employees and students for the purpose of building mutually supportive relationships;
- the President and chair of the Board of Trustees should continue to confer on a weekly basis and the President should explore ways to communicate regularly with trustees individually.; and
- the President should hold monthly meetings with the editorial staff and adviser of the student newspaper in order to enhance communications, relationships, and support the efforts of the student newspaper.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

It is suggested that:

- the President extend the current strategic planning process so as to ensure adequate participation, consultation, and communications of and with University constituencies in the formulation of the strategic plan;
- the leadership of the strategic planning process continue to explore ways to increase opportunities for campus leaders representing various constituencies, particularly faculty and academic department chairs, to participate meaningfully in the planning process;
- emphasis be given in the strategic plan to initiatives and action steps intended to ensure effective internal communications, governance, and constituent relations;
- emphasis be given in the strategic plan to ensuring that the University is positioned to recruit, develop, reward and retain highly qualified faculty, professional staff and other employees;
- consideration should be given to incorporating into strategic planning other major academic and administrative planning activities (e.g. academic prioritization, operating and capital budgeting, enrollment management planning, among others);
- consideration should be given to creating feedback loops for periodic updates, and reporting of progress towards strategic priorities, initiatives, and action steps; and
- consideration is given to continuing the expert involvement of an external facilitator in the strategic planning process through its conclusion and implementation.

CONCLUSION

- In this Facilitator's judgment, important questions to be addressed at CMU might include:
 - Is the University continuing to make substantial progress in fulfilling its mission of service to its students and the citizens of Michigan despite the recent acrimony? In what ways, if at all, has/is the recent acrimony inhibiting CMU from achieving its full potential?
 - If the fractured relationship between the administration and the faculty is contributing to diminishing performance and satisfaction, what might be done to mitigate the problems?
 - What should be done to unite the University's constituencies, both external and internal, in a common effort to serve the interests of CMU?
 - Are the leaders of various constituencies committed to reconciling their respective differences in order for the University's interests to be served with a high level collegiality and professionalism? (Only people of goodwill, truly committed to making CMU an exemplary academic community, can make it happen.)