

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP: THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC PLANNING IN SELECT  
LAND-GRANT INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN  
THE UNITED STATES

A Dissertation

by

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## ABSTRACT

The role of strategic planning in land-grant institutions of higher education in the United States vary by institution. An ample amount of non-scholarly literature exists on the topic of strategic plan development; however, very little scholarly literature covers strategic plan development, implementation, assessment, or the relationship of strategic planning to fundraising. The objective of this study was to identify how institutional strategic plans at six land-grant institutions were used, understand the role of executive leadership in strategic planning, determine if there was a connection to fundraising and marketing, and recognize if strategic plans were used to influence government or legislative bodies. The research found that strategic planning practices at each institution are peculiar, varying in practice based on time, place, leadership style, and economic conditions. Strategic plans were used for institutional fundraising among donors in all institutions studied and in some cases, they were used to influence government or legislative bodies. The research concludes with recommendations that resulted from the research intended to benefit higher education faculty, staff, or administrators who utilize or participate in strategic planning activities.

## DEDICATION

This effort is dedicated first and foremost to my wife, Rebecca Kisse, who never stopped encouraging me to finish my doctoral program when there were so many reasons to walk away. The countless hours spent away from home as I worked away in my office was only made possible by you being the most phenomenal wife and mother that I could possibly have. Thank you, sincerely, from the depth of my heart.

Secondly, I dedicate this effort to my five sons; Jacob, Jordan, Johnathan, Jonah, and Jared. May this work be an inspiration to you as you find your path in life. In any case, know that I am proud of you no matter your educational path in life and that a doctoral degree makes you no less successful in life. Being who you want to be and contributing back to the people who have helped you in life are what make you successful as a person. Be your own person, be free, and make your own path.

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## CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

### **Contributors**

This work was supervised by a dissertation committee consisting of Dr. Glenda Musoba [Committee Chairperson – Educational Administration and Human Resource Development], Dr. Vicente Lechuga [Educational Administration and Human Resource Development], and Dr. Christine Stanley [Educational Administration and Human Resource Development] of the College of Education and Human Development, and Dr. Jerry Strawser [Department of Accounting] of the Mays Business School.

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All other work conducted for this dissertation was completed by the student independently.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

During the late 1970's and early 1980's, higher education institution (HEI) revenues decreased while costs increased, graduate programs had excess capacity, and research grant revenue struggled under immense competitive pressure. Federal legislation in the 1972 amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1964 added to the pressure on HEI's through the establishment of state councils and coordinating commissions to determine budgets, capital construction, and academic program changes (Thelin, 2004). Simply put, revenue decreased while costs increased with public institutions finding themselves under a new lens of scrutiny and accountability, forcing a response to the changing conditions.

HEI's looked for ways to respond to these challenges, which meant doing something more than cutting office supply expenses and remembering to turn off the lights. In 1983, George Keller, a higher education scholar at the University of Pennsylvania, published *Academic Strategy*, which adopted the Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) concept and provided a scholarly foundation for the use of "strategic planning" in higher education as a method for long-range planning. Keller's (1983) framework advocated not only the SWOT technique, but included an examination of an HEI's traditions, values, leadership abilities, previous institutional priorities, financial constraints, and a market examination of competing institutions. Due to the academically-centric focus of his work, Keller's (1983) framework catalyzed

the adoption of strategic planning in higher education (Pagel, 2011) as numerous institutions would utilize Keller's work throughout the 1980's and beyond.

During this time period, strategic planning entered into higher education management practices as an answer to financial problems, public institution accountability, and as a method to restore public confidence in higher education. Military, government, and for-profit organizations had already utilized strategic planning in prior decades. General Motors developed the Planning, Programming, and Budgeting System (PPBS) in 1961, a method of "long-range planning" that required extensive effort. PPBS examined internal strengths and weaknesses in light of external opportunities and threats, leading to the first mention of the SWOT analysis (Presley & Leslie, 1999) as later used by Keller (1983).

According to Sevier (2008), up to an estimated 70% of colleges and universities in the United States engage in some form of strategic planning. A wide range of claims propose that 50-90% of strategic initiatives fail, however, the evidence for these claims are often outdated, fragmentary, fragile, or just absent (Candido & Santos, 2015). As a result, the effectiveness of strategic planning in higher education institutions lack reliable evidence to support its continued widespread use.

Candido & Santos (2015), economics scholars from the University of Algarve in Faro, Portugal, developed a set of guiding principles and conducted a comprehensive literature review focused on understanding the supporting justifications for strategic plan failure percentage as published by numerous authors. The scholars examined 35 strategy implementation failure rate studies and claims that were referenced by over 138 authors

in numerous sectors including business, non-profit, and government. Their literature review also included direct contact of for-profit consulting firms who had made strategic plan percentage failure claims based on an independent study.

The results of Candido & Santos (2015) work examined strategic implementation failure claims ranging from 15% to 90% claimed failure rates with numerous individual percentages within the range. The authors concluded that labeling a specific percentage for strategic plan implementation failure that can be applied universally is difficult to determine with any certainty. The difficulty is due to the wide variation in the definition of strategic plan implementation success and failure. For example, strategic plan success in an oil and gas company seeking to increase revenues might be entirely different than an HEI seeking to increase student success. Further, strategic plan success differences within a single sector can even be problematic. For example, student success goals found in a strategic plan at a community college versus a public research university could vary dramatically in their ability to be implemented successfully.

As a result, strategic planning as an effective tool for long-range planning within a HEI is an understudied and questionable approach given their widespread use and unknown rate of success or failure. Greater understanding of strategic planning efficacy is needed. This study will not seek to develop a strategic plan implementation rate percentage, nor will it advocate for new or different approaches to strategic planning at a HEI so as to create more positive outcomes. Rather, this study will seek to understand the rationale factor(s) for the use of strategic planning to develop a claim for whether or

not HEI faculty and administrators should continue to use them or abandon their use in practice.

Recognizing the rationale and benefits for strategic planning is important since an extensive amount of time is devoted to the planning, development, prioritization, and consensus process associated with strategic plans. At large public land grant institutions (LGI), the effort required can be enormous. For example, the Ohio State University, the LGI for the State of Ohio, recruited over 500 faculty, staff, and students from across the University to participate in the most recent strategic planning process over a period of nine months (Ohio State, 2018).

At the Pennsylvania State University, a peer LGI to Ohio State, analyses of published strategic planning materials indicate that Penn State exercises an elaborate strategic planning process (Penn State Strategic Plan, 2018). A university strategic planning council is charged by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to develop five-year plans that constitute the overall strategic vision and “themes” for the university. An executive oversight committee, comprised of thirty-two members that span across executive leaders, student leaders, faculty leaders, and staff leaders, monitor and adjust the five-year plans that set the high-level, strategic vision for the University. The five-year plan is reviewed, modified, and approved by the Board of Trustees with eight executive committees responsible for identifying key strategies to support the University’s strategic goals and direct resources to support the strategies (Penn state, 2018).

Strategic planning commitments are certainly not free as illustrated at Penn State and Ohio State, and strategic planning has a range of direct and indirect costs across both personnel and non-personnel expenses. What then are the rationale factors for significant investment into strategic planning at LGI's? Given the costs of strategic planning and the risk of a negative impact to morale and future planning when strategic plans fail to be implemented, LGI practitioners must understand the rationale for using strategic plans as a long-range planning tool. Considering their widespread use and risk of failure, one must ask whether the process should be continued. HEI's, namely LGI's, must document that strategic planning is working, or stop doing it at all.

So, what is strategic planning that we should continue or discontinue its use? Numerous scholars and authors have defined strategic planning. According to Allison and Kaye (2005) strategic planning is a systematic process through which an organization agrees on and builds commitment among key stakeholders toward priorities that are essential to its mission. Rollinson and Young (2010) define a strategic plan as a plan of action to achieve a goal or a goal set and strategic planning as the entire set of processes necessary to formulate a strategic plan. Rowley and Sherman (2001) define strategic planning as a formal process designed to help an organization identify and maintain an optimal alignment with the most important elements of its environment. Bryson (2011) argues that strategic planning is simply a set of concepts, procedures, and tools designed to help leaders, managers, and planners think, act, and learn to produce effective decisions and actions that create value.

Regardless of the intent for why strategic planning is used as a long-range planning tool, there is certainly variation in the definition and intent of strategic planning. Is strategic planning a mechanism to meet the needs of customers in the best possible way to create value as a result of a strategic plan? Is it a focus on organizational behavior with the intent of addressing human psychology through intentional interventions into an organization? Is it a document that rests on a website intended to tell the world that an organization is competent and capable? Or, perhaps it is a means of conquering one's enemy like Sun Tzu in *The Art of War* (Sun-tzu & Griffith, 1964)?

The research presented in this article will seek to understand this question in the context of higher education. For purposes of consistency in exploring the research, I will examine strategic planning through the viewpoint that strategic planning is a mechanism intended to best meet the future needs of a public land-grant institution.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this research was to explore the justification, or rationale, for strategic planning through the lens of resource allocation and work activities in a limited number of higher education land-grant institutions (LGI) in the United States. A number of themes emerged from a pilot study conducted through interviews with executive leaders at Texas A&M University, the LGI for the State of Texas. The study produced more questions than answers, prompting a need to explore in greater detail across a wider population of LGI's. This dissertation was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the primary purpose for developing a strategic plan at the institution or unit level (e.g. college/division/etc.)?
2. Are institution-wide and unit strategic plans linked to the budget and resource allocation process?
3. Is there a relationship between institution or unit strategic plans with external marketing and fundraising activities? When yes, this question is supported by subsidiary questions:
  - a. What roles use the strategic plan in support of marketing and fundraising activities (e.g. CEOs, Provosts, Deans, etc.)?
  - b. How are strategic plans used to support marketing and fundraising activities?

- c. When donor-designated funds associated with strategic plans are received, how does this impact the priority of strategic plan initiatives? How does this impact the budget allocation process?
- 4. Are institution-wide strategic plans used to align work activities to the goals of the CEO or Provost or how are unit strategic plans used to align work activities to the goals of the unit leader (e.g. Deans, Vice-CEOs, Vice-Provosts, etc.)?
- 5. Are institution-wide or unit strategic plans used when interacting with government and legislative personnel?
- 6. How do strategic planning leaders know if a strategic plan was successful at their institution and what are the measures for determining success?

## **Significance of the Study**

The underlying purpose of the research was to determine if strategic plans at LGI's are used to support external marketing and fundraising activities, align institutional work to the goals of executive leaders, or to reveal new "rationale factors." An argument will be made advocating whether strategic planning at LGI's should be continued or abandoned when considering their direct or latent benefits, as it is theorized that strategic plans may offer a "symbolic" purpose at LGI's which cannot be measured from an implementation perspective.

The recognition of rationale factors originally occurred to me during an analysis of Michigan State University, the LGI for the State of Michigan, during a doctoral degree course. In the analysis, I recognized that there had been only two strategic plan updates in the past 12 years. Notably, the first strategic plan update occurred during a period of Michigan state budget cuts that fundamentally altered the original strategic planning process at Michigan State. The strategic plan update process was suspended during this time, as strategic initiatives were deemed to be inappropriate during the years where addressing fiscal problems were paramount. The second finding revealed that the strategic planning process in the years following the suspension had integrated with the institution-wide budget process and evolved into an entirely new process with a different purpose. The experience of this LGI indicated to me that the rationale for strategic planning can change based on external factors such as legislative financial constraints that result in an entirely different purpose than originally intended.

Coupled with the finding at Michigan State, during a Texas A&M pilot study for a doctoral course, one interview candidate revealed that the strategic plan, known as Vision 2020, had generated significant support for capital campaigns over a three-year period following the completion of the strategic planning process. However, another interview participant held an entirely different view. This individual had observed several instances of strategic alignment through directing institutional work activities within Texas A&M University to align with the goals and directives of the CEO using the strategic plan. There was no mention of strategic planning as a benefit for capital campaigns, rather, that such plans had the potential to align institutional work activities to executive leaders.

The findings from these studies reveal that strategic plans could have multiple rationale factors, in direct contrast with the Candido & Santos (2015) study that highlighted implementation as the primary measure for success. This study adds value to the existing body of strategic planning research in higher education through a focus on the rationale factors for strategic planning at LGI's against the backdrop of resource allocation. The research identified how such plans are truly utilized at LGI's with the intention of offering an updated view on strategic planning as a long-range planning tool with an advocacy for whether or not they should be continued or abandoned and this recommendation is offered in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter offers literature relevant to the research questions divided into five components. The first component, *strategic planning, implementation, and assessment*, will offer literature related to the foundational understanding of the three primary elements of strategic planning that is abundant in the present body of literature.

The second component, *strategic plan integration*, will cover literature that focuses on theories associated with integrating strategic planning with unit plans, capital plans, and a variety of sub-plans that are intended to align with the institution-wide strategic plan.

The third component, *relationship of strategic planning with budgeting and resource allocation* will highlight current budget and resource allocation methodologies that have been used or are currently in-use at LGI's and their relationship to strategic planning where possible.

The fourth component, *marketing and fundraising in higher education*, will examine basic marketing and fundraising approaches to generating revenue in higher education with a focus on LGI's where possible. The final component, *critiques of strategic planning as a long-range planning tool*, will provide a variety of critiques that question the value of strategic planning as a long-range planning tool for higher education institutions.

## **Strategic Planning, Implementation, and Assessment**

The strategic planning process and the associated outcome of publishing a strategic plan, is only one component to the lifecycle associated with planning organizational improvements. Pacios (2004) outlined a lifecycle that spans across strategic planning, strategic execution and management, and strategic plan assessment. According to Pacios (2004), the primary feature that strategic planning introduced was the need to analyze the external environment in order to arrive at a strategic diagnosis of a company. Pacios developed three guiding questions; 1) What is the current situation of the organization?, 2) What does it want to achieve?, and 3) What must it do to achieve it? The conclusions offered by Pacios were based on an analysis of both form and content differences between plans named “strategic” and those named “long-range” as published on the web pages in a sample of 65 library websites comprised of 34 public and 31 private universities. The goal of the content analysis was to see whether the differences that some theorists observe between strategic and long-range planning actually exist on plans published with those names.

Pacios (2004) work supports the interchanging terminology between strategic planning and long-range planning, allowing for either term to be used since her study compared document sections of strategic plans and long-range plans, finding them to overlap significantly. The differences highlighted in the study does show a difference in granularity and implementation elements. The study found that specific objectives, actions, projects, and expected outcomes were found at a higher percentage among documents titled as “long-range” plans versus those with “strategic” plans, supporting

the notion that strategic plans can generally be thought of as more “aspirational” in their writing. However, an enormous amount of overlap was evident in the study, leading Pacios (2004) to conclude that there are no significant differences between plans named “strategic” and those named “long-range.” This study supports flexibility in the data collection and analysis activities when participants reference either strategic planning or long-range planning, as they can essentially be referenced as the same overall process.

Adding to the nuance of strategic or long-range planning, implementation techniques used to enact the plan may produce results that vary significantly from the original intention cited in the planning process. The implementation of a strategic plan may use a strategic operating plan to guide the implementation of the strategic plan, or nothing at all, leaving the document as aspirational with no documented history of implementation. Even more, the assessment of strategic plans will likely use a methodology completely unrelated to the planning and implementation process. While strategic planning and long-range planning are synonymous according to Pacios (2004), the resulting plan, its implementation, and possible later assessment, contain unique nuances that merit an understanding of their differences across the literature.

### **Strategic Plans and Planning**

According to Rollinson and Young (2010), in their expert opinion, strategy is defined as a plan of action to achieve a goal or a goal set. Strategic planning is defined as the entire set of processes necessary to formulate a strategic plan. Rollinson and Young (2010) further advocate for the emergence of strategic management, which encompasses planning, implementation, and assessment through continuous strategic

thinking to update the plan while simultaneously managing the implementation of plan objectives.

Strategic management produces a strategic operating plan, which is a sub-plan of the overall strategic plan that outlines specific projects and initiatives necessary to implement the overarching strategic plan. The authors take a holistic approach to strategic planning which advocates for the use of a strategic plan, strategic operating plan, and an integrated project portfolio that is prioritized and monitored by executive leaders in the organization who guide the management of the strategic projects. The view by Rollinson and Young (2010) is implementation and business-centric, reflecting the common thinking that strategic plans are tools used to align the work activities of an organization to the strategic vision of executive leaders at various levels in the organization.

Bryson (2010) conducted a case study of three public or nonprofit institutions that included a public-school district, a U.S. naval security group, and a nonprofit social service agency. Through his case study examination, he illustrates and defines strategic planning as a deliberative, disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it.

In the context of government and non-profit institutions, Bryson (2010) advocates for linking budgeting, performance measurement, and performance management to meet mandates, achieve agreed mission, goals, and strategies. His approach to strategic planning is open to changes in the ends and means over time in

order to stay current with public values, essentially moving away from the concept of strategic plans as static documents that cover several years of strategy (e.g. 10-year plans, 20-year plans, etc.). Like Rollinson and Young (2010), Bryson (2010) argues for strategic management as a reasonable integration of strategic planning and implementation across an organization in an ongoing way to enhance the fulfillment of organizational mission, meeting mandates from external entities, and continuous learning by stakeholders throughout the organization. While the managerial success for Rollinson and Young's (2010) recommendations seem possible, a comprehensive study to support their recommendations is absent.

### **Strategic Plan Implementation**

Daniel Rowley, a professor at the University of Northern Colorado, and Herbert Sherman, Director of Professional Studies at Southampton College of Long Island University, offered an expert opinion of several strategic plan implementation techniques in their 2001 work, *From Strategy to Change*. They provide insight into how an HEI can leverage a "choice model" that requires the development of a current-state analysis to understand the overall strategic position of the HEI via two main components. The first component examines the amount of resources presently available to the HEI (financial, physical, human), the second approach offers a range from a consumer-focused culture (student enrollment and service driven) to a provider-focused culture (institutional research and knowledge generation), and then presents an analysis of the institutions ability to take on risk (financial, compliance, and new investments). Rowley and Sherman (2001) provide a graph that places institution types (community college,

regional, research, etc.) into a zone. The zone is intended to be used by an HEI leader to recognize the strategic orientation of how an institution within a specific zone should develop and implement a strategy.

Rowley & Sherman's work covers strategic plan implementation by offering eleven implementation methods. The methods are intended to highlight techniques for persuading faculty, staff, and students to "buy-in" to the implementation actions needed to fulfill the intended outcomes of a strategic plan. Among the eleven methods, three methods were discussed by other authors to include using force through executive decision-making, using participation of stakeholders during planning, and the use technology systems to track projects and progress toward strategic goals.

The problem with Rowley and Sherman's (2001) work is that it was developed based on their expert opinion and utilized frameworks created by other authors, such as Miles and Snow's book *Organizational Strategy, Structure and Process* (1978) and Porter's *Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors* (1980), who did not validate their frameworks through research. The lack of validation or application of the model in a HEI reduces the reliability and transferability of the model. As a result, I have chosen not to utilize Rowley and Sherman's (2001) framework for data analysis activities. Nevertheless, other authors have utilized the framework and contributed to the literature through their expert opinion via three of the eleven methods presented. Their experience is useful in gaining an understanding of the current strategic plan practices commonly in the literature.

The first method, “using force,” describes the appropriateness of when to use force to enact organizational change via a strategic plan (Chaffee, 1984; Ghobadian et al., 2008; Sullivan & Richardson, 2011). Using force, as an example, is exemplified when a HEI executive leader (Chief Financial Officer, Dean, Provost, etc.) executes a unilateral decision through policy, budget, memorandum, or any number of actions that do not consult with stakeholders.

The second notable implementation method was the use of “participation” across an HEI. An example of strategic plan implementation participation is when students, faculty, staff, or other key stakeholders are involved in determining how to actually implement the plan at the tactical and task level. Rowley and Sherman (2001) believe that people have a basic need to either benefit from the plan or be an originator of some portion of its outcome(s). By involving stakeholders to develop implementation strategies, they are more likely to support the overall plan (Mintzberg, 1993; Reeves, 2008). The downside of the approach is that the more people involved, the longer and more difficult it is to implement.

Another view on strategic plan implementation is through the use of a project portfolio management system to resource and track the implementation of strategic plan initiatives. Dietrich and Lehtonen (2005) developed a framework of success factors based on the management of projects in a project portfolio context that connected to initiatives linked to strategic intentions determined by an organization. Their quantitative study assessed 288 public and private organizations by examining the factors correlating with project success when managing strategic intentions of the

organization through multiple projects to deliver an outcome. The scholars utilized a questionnaire-based survey targeted to large and medium-sized Finnish organizations. The sample consisted of organizations implementing multiple simultaneous project-like development activities. The questionnaire was sent to 1102 private and public organizations employing more than 100 people to respondents who were responsible for strategic development and implementation activities.

The study found that the most successful organizations at implementing a strategic plan using Dietrich and Lehtonen's (2005) framework, organized at least most of their strategic initiatives into a project portfolio, where they were periodically evaluated and prioritized through a decision-making process that allocated resources necessary to the achievement of project outcomes.

Dietrich and Lehtonen (2005) were not alone in their claim, as similar views of strategic plan implementation through the use of a project portfolio are present in the literature, though most studies were biased toward consultant agencies, professional organizations, and media publications who have a favorable interest in supporting a project-centric view of strategic plan implementation. The comprehensive literature review by Candido & Santos (2015) that identified strategic plan failure percentage claims revealed multiple groups with project-centric failure claims. The Project Management Institute, IBM Global Business Services, and Prospectus Strategy Consultants each conducted a study using a survey that produced a strategic plan implementation failure rate that was connected to a project-portfolio solution for improving future strategic plan implementation. Studies such as these have been used to

support the concept of strategic portfolio management in recent literature, though must be used with caution given the implied benefit to those groups when practitioners adopt their methods. It is important to recognize that the literature review of Candido & Santos (2015) confirmed the studies used by these groups to be unreliable and biased toward the implied goals of the aforementioned organizations.

Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence (1997) offered a similar argument toward strategic plan implementation using a project-centric view based on their shared strategic planning experiences at the University of Northern Colorado. In their book, *Strategic Change in Colleges and Universities*, Rowley et al. argue that one of the most important outcomes from strategic planning is the facilitation of a decision-making process that stimulates organizational change based on the strategic plan. The process is characterized by strategic thinking followed by a subsequent decision-making process. The authors argue that strategic thinking occurs when decision makers are able to visualize what they want their organization to become, and when they are able to align their resources to implement the outcomes successfully.

More important than the strategic plan document itself, Rowley et al. (1997) argue that the decision-making process associated with the selection of resource allocation and project priorities are the true force of implementation that is necessary to ensure that change happens in such a way that the intent of the strategic plan is realized.

While Rowley et al. (1997) offered a unique view that is less project-centric through the use of strategic thinking, their work was never applied beyond theory in a higher education environment. Further, their views represent the coalescence of several

business-oriented concepts in strategic planning to include key performance indicators, the standard SWOT analysis, and the use of a strategic planning committee. For higher education scholars and practitioners, their work becomes problematic as the concepts are based on an experience within a single HEI, limiting the ability to apply their work more widely across higher education.

### **Strategic Plan Assessment**

Mellalieu (1992) utilizes the concept of “strategic drift”, where an organization moves away from the initial excitement of a strategic plan, loses decision-making alignment, and experiences a decrease in strategic plan-related communications. Mellalieu, through his professional opinion, recognizes that strategic drift is more evident when executive leadership turnover occurs.

A common action of a new CEO or Provost is to conduct their own assessment of the institution in the first year of their tenure, followed by changes to the strategic plan, the institutions objectives, or the creation of an entirely new strategic plan. Mellalieu (1992), based on his professional opinion, argues that there is not too much merit in auditing a strategic plan three or four years after publication of the original strategic plan. This is founded on the belief that an organization with a strategic management process will have updated the plan on a periodic cycle. Second, given the turnover of executives, the original plan's creators may assume accountability for actions which have not gone according to the strategic plan. Third, measurable objectives are better placed within the domain of operational plans, making it difficult for the strategic plan to be assessed as the initiatives are often written in a general manor to allow for broad

interpretation of the plan. This is especially true in large higher education institutions with multiple colleges (Mellalieu, 1992).

While Mellalieu (1992) did not move his ideas beyond theory and professional opinion, his argument outlining the problem of executive turnover and the impact on strategic plan assessment and re-vitalization is supported by Trachtenberg, Kauvar, & Baug (2013), who cite that the average tenure of a CEO for a public doctoral institution was 6.5 years in 2007 based on an American Council of Education survey in 2007.

Like Mellalieu (1992), Trachtenberg et al. (2013) take little stock in strategic plan assessment due to high rates of executive turnover among CEOs and Provosts in HEI's. The authors captured quotes and lessons learned from 56 former CEO's and Provost's who highlighted what they would have done differently during their tenure in office. The qualitative study using direct quotes and memoirs support the claim that strategic plan development or revision should occur within the first 1-2 years of a new CEO or Provost's tenure. Consequently, there is little perceived value in comprehensive strategic plan assessment at a later date due to the likelihood of executive turnover, which leads to the desire of new executives to refresh or rebuild the strategic plan, reducing the value of strategic plan implementation assessment.

Sullivan & Richardson (2011) suggested an integrated strategic plan outcomes assessment model for HEI's based on a qualitative study of Widener University's strategic plan approach. From an assessment perspective, the Widener approach connects strategic planning initiatives with employee performance reviews as an assessment method for encouraging the rate of strategic plan implementation.

Specifically, Sullivan & Richardson (2011), in their examination of Widener University to support their framework, highlight that strategic planning is not the production of a blueprint, a collection of college level plans, something done on an annual retreat, a way to eliminate risks, or a method to outwit the future. Rather, they argue that strategic planning is dependent on the development of a culture that embraces continuous self-reflection related to individual work, the work of the University, and the work of the organizational unit as the key outcome necessary to promote organizational change and improvement. Sullivan & Richardson (2011) offered a model that linked strategic planning to practice and continuous assessment that included an examination of the mission, guiding principles, strategic plan, target goal outcomes, and continuous assessment of the institution that is linked to unit, program, and individual stakeholder assessments. The model requires that the excitement linked to the initial planning events be maintained by actually connecting the implementation of strategic plan outcomes to work performed by individuals or their business units with a subsequent assessment of performance. The use of a “green, yellow, red” report that highlights strategic plan outcomes as either complete (green), in progress (yellow), or not started/at-risk (red) is the tool utilized for connecting Deans with faculty and staff throughout a college.

While Sullivan & Richardson (2011) make a compelling argument, they fail to adequately support the transferability of their model to higher education institutions in general. Their argument is mostly anecdotal and relies on the examination of a small liberal arts college with no post-assessment in later years to determine if the Widener University model is reliable. This article, in addition to those previously cited among

the strategic planning, implementation, and assessment literature, highlights the lack of scholarly research as applied to HEI's.

### **Strategic Plan Integration**

Reeves (2008), in his expert opinion, advocates for strategic plans that are designed to move educational institutions, namely secondary education institutions, toward actionable change in one or more components of the organization. Reeves (2008) claims that the common problem among strategic plans is that they are overly broad, infrequently updated, and often forgotten as those things that leaders wish they had the time to complete. Reeves suggests the use of an annual strategic planning process where diverse sets of stakeholders across the institution review the plan, update progress, re-evaluate the relevancy and applicability of plan outcomes, and enact the appropriate changes.

The annual process is then used to update unit strategic plans and specific plans associated with programs and services. Reeves (2008) promotes the use of a "strategy on a page" format approach to reduce strategic plan length down to a compressed view of the plan outcomes onto a single page. The purpose of such a reduction is to simplify strategic plan objectives as a way to encourage faculty and staff to use the plan as a guide for decision-making. By utilizing a shortened plan, there is a perceived increase in the potential for successful integration outcomes between the institution-wide plan and unit.

Reeves (2008) based his integration method arguments on his claim of research from analyzing hundreds of strategic plans from individual secondary schools and

school-district central-office departments. Reeves used White's (2005) assessment criteria for assessing secondary school outcome effectiveness and scored the strategic plans using 20 of Reeves (2006) dimensions of performance for secondary education strategic planning, implementation, and monitoring. Reeves then compared the plan ratings to student achievement at a baseline year corresponding to strategic plan development, and then compared the ratings of student achievement each year thereafter. Reeves (2008) claims that after controlling for school demographic variables, schools whose strategic plans ranked higher on the 20 dimensions had greater student achievement outcomes than those who did not.

While Reeves (2008) takes an interesting approach to connecting strategic plan integration with secondary education outcomes through the use of a "strategy on a page," there is no citation of evidence outlining the study, its methodology, or the transferability of the 20 dimensions used in a separate study for assessment that was unrelated to strategic planning.

Continuing the focus on strategic plan integration, Hinton (2012), in her expert opinion, identified that the reason for strategic plan implementation failure was that executive direction rarely integrated into the management layer for decision-making and investment. Colleges, divisions, and even departments, often have their own strategic plan that may not align to the institutional strategic plan. To address the problem of alignment, the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) advocates for intense integration and management of the multiple sub-plans that could arise across the university (Hinton, 2012). The numerous sub-plans include the academic master plan,

the enrollment management plan, the budget plan, the information technology plan, the facilities master plan, the advancement plan, the student services plan, the library plan, the residence life plan, the athletics plan, and any individual plan of a college or division. Consider the complexity laden within the management and alignment of such integration. How many resources, tools, and processes are necessary to manage such an integration? While it could be possible to manage such integration, research is needed to examine in detail those institutions that have successfully managed the integration advocated by the SCUP. For this reason, a significant weakness of strategic plans is manifested through an inability to “integrate with sub-plans” as there is presently no scholarly literature on the subject.

Of notable mention, Hinton (2012) developed a “master integration document” that listed all known sub-plans to be displayed as columns in a spreadsheet using her experience of leading strategic planning integrations on behalf of SCUP. The outcomes from the institution-wide strategic plan are listed as rows. The alignment between the sub-plans are then placed as an “x” in the cell, or given a rating level, across the row for the strategic outcome. This document is then used to guide prioritization and funding of plans. The maintenance of integration between the plans then required dedicated staffing and processes necessary to manage the information.

While Hinton’s (2012) argument for sub-plan alignment is compelling, and similar to the current approach taken at Penn State, the approach is not founded on scholarly research. Further, what the writing lacks is a method for gathering feedback to understand how effective the institutions using the SCUP method for integration are in

realizing their institutional and unit planning goals. The work of Hinton (2012) and Reeves (2008) highlight the lack of scholarly strategic plan integration literature in the higher education context. While I do not diminish their claims or methods, they are unsupported by research methodologies necessary to advocate the adoption of their methods across HEI's in general.

### **Relationship of Strategic Planning with Budgeting and Resource Allocation**

The extent to which an institution is able to realize its vision is dependent on how effectively it allocates scarce resources, as the budget is the financial representation of the organizations priorities and vision (Zierdt, 2009). Zierdt offered several higher education budgeting techniques associated with strategic planning based on qualitative case studies of Ohio State University (OSU), the University of Southern California, the Minnesota State Colleges and University System. These budgeting techniques include incremental, formula, zero-based budgeting, program, performance, initiative, & responsibility centered management (RCM).

Zierdt offered that each budgeting technique created behavioral incentives for administrative decision-making across the institution. For example, faculty at OSU were concerned that courses would suffer from having insufficient teaching assistants, as the RCM budget technique promoted cost control, efficiency, and increased revenue per course. This created an environment where faculty reduced their time allotted to service obligations (faculty senate, committee membership, task force's, etc.) and spent more time working against the budgeting process. This correlated with the concept of organizational and strategic planning techniques changing the behavior of organizational

members (Hearn, Lewis, Kallsen, Holdsworth, & Jones 2006) in response to actions by executive leadership and the perception of their intention toward individual members of the organization. The claim made by Zierdt (2009) is that while numerous resource allocation methods are available to connect with strategic planning, there is no single resource allocation method that is better than another when connecting to a strategic planning process. As a hypothetical example, if an institution first creates a clear and coherent vision of the future focused on student learning, quality of academic staff work-life and reduced costs for students, the most appropriate budget tool will become readily identified (Zierdt, 2009).

Hearn et al. (2006) explored incentives-base budget systems (IBBS), which includes RCM and value centered management (VCM) approaches used to integrate budgeting and management decision-making across the institution and down to the level of departmental cost centers. A case study was conducted at the University of Minnesota (UM), where declining state funding created a budget crisis, and the need for a strategic plan to address organizational problems was cited as a solution. UM created a program known as “Incentives for Managed Growth” (IMG), which was a version of IBBS that was used to manage budgets across the institution using a hybrid model that leveraged both RCM and VCM techniques.

The IMG program was designed from the beginning to fit directly into the university’s longstanding commitment to strategic planning (Hearn et al., 2006). UM had been recognized nationally for its innovative strategic planning efforts, but by the mid-1990s, those efforts had encountered strong external and internal challenges

(Simsek & Louis, 1994). The IMG program represented an effort to update and advance the university's aggressive pursuit of long-term efficiency and effectiveness by linking budgeting to planning (Hearn et al., 2006).

Hearn et al. (2006) interviewed three collegiate deans 3 years after the IMG program began and found that the Provost had to be a watchdog for the bad incentives that IMG created. This nuance of the IMG program method dis-incentivized colleges from doing land-grant, or public service work that did not directly align with the revenue generation goals in the strategic plan. Hearn et al. (2006) also found that the connection of the IMG program to the strategic plan required effective measurement of the results that were deemed as "critical outcomes" in the strategic plan. The problem was that colleges found it difficult to measure many of their goals, requiring additional support from central administrators at UM, which were not able to provide the expertise necessary to enable the extensive tracking of metrics (Hearn et al., 2006). Essentially, what seemed like an intuitive solution to the funding dilemmas in Minnesota, coupled with the need to promote the outcomes of the strategic plan, created numerous problems across UM that would require changes in the IMG program in later years.

According to Dickeson (2010), in his expert opinion as CEO Emeritus of the University of Colorado, the connection between the strategic plan and the budgeting process for the institution is often unclear and unrealistic. Dickeson asserted that less than twenty percent of strategic plans mention where the required resources will come from to implement the plan and fewer still identify reallocation of existing resources. Strategic plans have become purely additive: after months or even years of analysis,

campuses come up with unrealistic wish list, encompassing new programs, new equipment, new buildings, new services, new faculty, new staff, and new initiatives that assume that all existing programs, goals, and objectives will be maintained. If resources are mentioned at all, they are to be enhanced by hiking tuition, increasing enrollment, or raising more money.

Dickeson (2010) wrote an account of experiences as a higher education administrator, where his most common criticism of strategic planning in higher education is the lack of connection to the budgeting process. Further, the strategic plan outcomes typically imply that the institution will focus on certain academic programs and services while diminishing or eliminating others. However, the saved resources, cost savings, and productivity gains are rarely identified or returned to the departments or programs who generated those savings (Dickeson, 2010).

While there is much critique toward the disconnect between strategic plans and the budget process, Dickeson (2010) recognized that a strategic prioritization and reallocation process is good for an HEI and often prompted by good intentions. It was cited that a large private university overcame the disconnect by forming a special strategic planning committee that reviewed budget proposals annually and made recommendations to executive leaders, using the institution-wide strategic plan as the prioritization rubric.

Stopped here Perhaps the most intriguing argument made by Dickeson (2010) is his citation of a strategic planning and budget review process comprised of nine stages that was executed at an LGI. Stage 1, *Preparation*, requires Colleges and Divisions to assign

weights to programs and services offered. Stage 2, *Information-Gathering*, submits data on the performance of the programs and services to the respective College or Division leader using a custom-rubric unique to the College or Division. However, the rubric must contain a small number of rubric elements that are necessary across the institution. Stage 3, *First Analysis*, requires the College or Division leader to divide the programs and services into 5 categories, where the top 20% of programs and services are eligible for investment and the bottom 20% are eligible for merger, consolidation, or reduction. The leaders conduct hearings within their College or Division and seek input for improving and refining the ratings.

The process shifts in Stage 4, *Second Analysis*, as the Provost and Vice CEOs then review program information and render judgements on a comparative basis under their respective areas. The results are then published and a request for input from stakeholders across the institution is sought. Stage 5, *Final Analysis*, employs a review by the CEO and the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) who examines the recommendations against the strategic plan and offers a prioritized view to the CEO using the institution-wide strategic plan. Stage 6, *Synthesis*, reviews past strategic plans, major initiatives underway, task force plans and recommendations, and relevant information that influences the final report used by the CEO.

Stage 7, *Final Decision Stage*, shifts to the Board of Trustees who review the updated Strategic Plan. The Board may elect to hold hearings to seek input and receive recommendations from the public. Once the Board edits and approves, the CEO is then directed to implement the plan. Stage 8, *Implementation*, requires the SPC to make

recommendations on objective priorities that outline outcome goals with dates, costs, and information related to implementation. At this point, the document is referenced by the budget planning process that allocates funding based on priorities from the CEO and the SPC. Stage 9, *Renewal*, occurs on a periodic basis and repeats stages 1-8. Such an intensive process would be overly burdensome to conduct on an annual basis. An LGI would need to determine if there were requirements for a certain periodic cycle and if not, determine the right frequency for such planning.

Dickeson's (2010) work is intriguing, however, it is not grounded in scholarly research and requires further exploration and study to understand if his arguments link to strategic plan outcomes. Dickeson (2010) frequently references the Society for College and University Planning (SCUP) to support his arguments for strategic plan integration with the budget planning process, however, as noted previously in this article, the SCUP has not conducted scholarly research to support their arguments. Apart from Hearn et al.'s (2006) work published in *The Journal of Higher Education*, there is an extremely limited body of scholarly literature on this topic.

## **Marketing & Fundraising in Higher Education**

Brint (2005) conducted a survey of 143 public and private research university faculty and administrators to understand the response of HEI's to the "new directions." The new directions are a reference to the pressure of governments, corporations, citizens, and the like, who desire for HEI's to change into more entrepreneurial enterprises that are able to offer the lowest possible tuition and generate the most educated students possible for benefit by the workforce. Brint (2005) found that as state appropriations have levelled or dropped, many public research universities have focused on, and achieved, increases in revenues from tuition, research grants, licensing of technologies, endowment, and annual giving. Public research universities are no longer as dependent on tuition and state appropriations as they once were, reflecting the adjustments made in response to dwindling state appropriations (Brint, 2005). However, they continue to require state appropriations and face fierce competition from private research institutions for research dollars and donor giving.

Public research universities have developed significant capabilities in fundraising and are able to conduct elaborate marketing and capital campaigns. The past decade has been an extraordinary period for higher education fundraising, with virtually all of the largest public and private research universities successfully completing billion dollar-plus capital campaigns (Brint, 2005). Contributions to campus-wide initiatives typically form a significant part of the capital campaigns. At the University of Virginia, the CEO spotlighted four major initiatives in the "Virginia 2020 Priorities" as centerpieces of the

capital campaign linked to the university strategic plan, which then allocated approximately \$450 million to the four strategic priority areas (Brint, 2005).

Tighter state budgets require well-managed fundraising efforts to join funding from a variety of sources to support strategic initiatives. As an example, West Virginia University, the LGI for the State of West Virginia, uses surpluses from continuing education or auxiliary enterprises to support campus-wide initiatives coupled with funds generated through external fundraising (Brint, 2005). As a result, the ability to synthesize funds and strategically source those funds is an important capability for an LGI. Brint (2005) concludes that the “new directions” are taking shape more as rhetoric than as embedded institutional realities that have, or will, cause a complete transformation of university structure except at a few institutions who have some form of crisis. Such transformations require a distribution, or at least a change in the power structures within a university that are often difficult to address and are part of wicked problem sets that require more than one solution to more than one problem (Batie, 2008). Brint’s (2005) research proposes the concept that strategic planning processes and strategic plans themselves may be used to support external fundraising efforts and form a response to the “new directions” demanded by societal influence on higher education in recent years. Essentially, strategic plans can be shaped in such a way that they are used to influence prospective donors toward a donation by highlighting strategic plan initiatives that uniquely appeal to those prospective donors.

Conley & Temple (2006), in their expert opinion, recognized that development and public relations offices on public college campuses were once considered secondary,

or insignificant functions, but have now become clear partners with top executive leaders, as the influence of fundraising can warrant a tremendous priority. Commonly called “institutional advancement” offices, fundraising and development functions receive significant attention in strategic plans, highlighting the importance of raising funds from prospective donors. In 2004, Penn State University, the LGI for the State of Pennsylvania, ranked “an enhanced investment in fund raising” as the second highest priority for the institution (Conley & Tempel, 2006). In contrast, this ranking was higher than “increased K-12 educational partnerships” and “initiatives in the humanities, fine arts, and social sciences,” all of which are core functions of an LGI. Further, this ranking followed a \$1.37 billion capital campaign from 1996 to 2003 that was the highest funding received by the institution. In this example, institutional development is now at the center of the LGI administrative hierarchy in terms of importance.

Conley & Tempel (2006) further cite that while public institutions may still lag their private institution counterparts in terms of generating funds, the gap is closing with LGI’s now exceeding their goals. Between the years 2000-2003, six LGI’s set capital campaign goals of \$1 billion and exceeded their goals by several million dollars (Michigan State University, Ohio State University, University of Virginia, University of Minnesota, Penn State University, and the University of Colorado). It is no surprise that investments into institutional advancement capabilities continue to be made in order to gain funding for major initiatives as state appropriations decrease.

Satterwhite & Cedja (2005) connected the growing investment into fundraising capabilities in higher education to strategic planning with a focus on the role of the

University CEO and the strategic plan as a marketing tool. The scholars conducted a qualitative study that sought to examine the functions of the CEO in universities with capital campaigns less than \$100 million through three case studies that interviewed the CEO and Chief Development Officer at each institution.

According to Satterwhite & Cedja (2005), fundraising relies heavily on the strategic plan and vision of the university, and the CEO must be the primary individual in establishing the strategic plan in order to connect the goals of the fundraising process. The objectives outlined in the strategic plan are then cited by institutional advancement staff and crafted toward influencing prospecting donors in the hopes of gaining a donation. The research conducted by Satterwhite & Cedja (2005) reveal that CEOs are intrinsic components to the fundraising process and must connect the goals of the institution to the goals of the capital campaigns in order to be successful. The article argued the need for the CEO to work carefully in guiding the institution to prepare for capital campaigns through education, reorganization, and strategic planning in order to present the institution in the best possible way in order to create donor attraction.

Cook & Lasher (1996) also support the view of integrating capital campaigns with strategic planning. Their qualitative approach utilized a multiple case study design, with university CEOs as the primary unit of analysis and both fundraising and comprehensive campaigns as embedded units of analysis. Following an extensive literature review, data collection occurred over a 2-year period and included interviews with 50 academic leaders as well as analyses of selected documents such as campaign case statements and chief executive officer (CEO) vitas.

Cook & Lasher's (1996) work identified that CEOs provide fundraising leadership through their institutional role in policy formulation, vision, strategic planning, and involvement of campus leaders in developing strategic plans. These activities have the ability to unite internal constituents behind the campaign, motivate staff and volunteers, and guide the overall fundraising process toward higher levels of overall revenue when used by CEOs to appeal to donor motives that. The authors further concluded that individual donors have their own priorities and that CEOs must have something of real substance to sell to donors, whether it is a commitment to maintain quality, a commitment to achieve quality, or the ability to sell what is sought by the donor. CEOs must have a sense of what is possible and desirable for their institutions, and this can come only through strategic planning in consultation with many others both internal and external to the campus such as faculty, staff, alumni, trustees, students, and community leaders (Cook & Lasher, 1996).

Kotler and Murphy (1981), in their expert opinion as Marketing professors, describe the strategic planning process in higher education as a way to improve marketing opportunities by shaping the view of donors, the public, the board, and prospective faculty and students. The intended result is to attract more students and interest in the University.

The majority of their argument is centered around how to execute the strategic planning process to improve the external position of the higher education institution, and how to manage a strategic plan implementation to gain maximum position when competing for prospective students or faculty, research dollars, or any other activity that

requires competition for resources. Their advocacy also extends into offering specific techniques for conducting an “external environment analysis” intended to identify factors outside of the institution that will have a positive or negative impact on external activities. The authors advocate for a marketing information system, planning system, and control system. While the authors make a compelling argument, no supporting qualitative or quantitative studies occurred in the following years to support or refute their argument for strategic plans as a marketing tool.

### **Critiques of Strategic Planning as a Long-Range Planning Tool**

Mintzberg (1993) takes a different view using his expert opinion on strategic planning in *The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning*. Mintzberg promotes the concept of strategic “thinking” as opposed to “planning,” which involves intuition, creativity, and the ability to synthesize strategy across the organization as opposed to individualistic or business unit focused behavior.

Mintzberg believed much less in strategic plans and much more in a management culture that considered the advancement of the organization instead of the individual faculty member, department, or even college. Mintzberg further believed that strategic thinking beyond individualism is not a common behavior among organizational participants, as the tendency is to focus on managerial or operational duties that demand immediate attention. Through the process of strategic planning, leaders and managers are reminded to align their activities to the vision of executive leaders, aiding the process of improving the institution over time. Without such an exercise, managerial “sheep” go astray and lose sight of the need to follow their leaders. The chief critique offered

against traditional strategic plans is that they often seem “frozen in time” with a deep inability to be flexible, even with implementation management techniques. As a result, Mintzberg bases his advocacy for strategic plans to be used as a tool that encourages strategic thinking instead of a project plan that is laboriously tracked and implemented.

The problem with Mintzberg’s (1993) critique is that he based his position of strategic plan implementation failure on Kiechel’s (1982) study that utilized interviews carried out between 1979-1984 with corporate executives and consultants from major consulting companies. Candido & Santos (2015), in their comprehensive literature review of strategic plan implementation failure claims, found that Kiechel’s (1982) study, which claimed a 90% implementation failure rate, could not be validated as no research instrument or other methodology supporting information could be produced by the original study or data custodian. As a result, Mintzberg’s (1993) premise that strategic plans have little to no actual implementation, which supported all of the concepts in his extensive book, cannot be confirmed.

Drago (1996) examined the contexts where strategic plan intensity lead to greater higher education institution (HEI) performance. Drago’s (1996) quantitative study examined 91 for-profit business in a longitudinal study of the interaction between organizations and their environments for strategic plan intensity. Strategic plan intensity is defined as the degree to which strategic plans are used to guide decision-making and activities of an organization. Drago offered an interesting proposition outlining that strategic plans should only be used in cases where a high degree of institutional focus is desired with the need to extend coordination and control over managerial operations.

Further, due to the costs associated with strategic planning (staffing and expenses for development and long-term management), such plans should only be conducted when the benefits are believed to outweigh the costs. The author goes on to indicate that strategic plans are mostly inflexible, creating a challenge in responding to environments where frequent external or internal changes are present. As a result, organizations that are smaller, have less change, and are capable of robust communication and cooperation across functional units are ideally suited for strategic plans and the associated implementation.

While Drago's (1996) study was conducted outside higher education, the findings that correlate to strategic planning when used as a method for aligning work activities of an organization to executive leadership offers an insightful view. It is my opinion that large LGI's would benefit less from strategic plans intended to align organizational work than their community college colleagues, who tend to work in smaller, more organizationally centralized environments. Strategic planning is only one of numerous methods to conduct long-range planning.

### **Literature Review Summary**

Numerous scholars and authors have expounded on the flaws associated with strategic planning as a management tool in higher education. Mintzberg (1993) believed that strategic planning was of little value to higher education. More important was the concept of strategic "thinking" as opposed to "planning," which involves intuition, creativity, and the ability to synthesize strategy across the organization as opposed to

individualistic or business unit focused behavior. The primary idea was the development of an institutional culture that desired to advance the organization.

In similar opposition, William Tierney (2008) believed that strategic planning was only one element of the strategic decision-making process in higher education institutions. His work cited that the institutional environment, mission, socialization, information, strategy, and leadership components interlaced to construct the decision-making paradigm for the institution, not the strategic plan nor its planning process. Higher education scholar, Robert Birnbaum, went so far as to call strategic planning a “management fad” that caused institutions to struggle with their planning process, and that such a management tool would be difficult to ever adopt (Birnbaum, 2000).

The literature reviewed in this chapter provides background to conduct research that will contribute to this important topic in higher education that contains numerous critiques. The literature is clear that strategic planning is used in a variety of ways across higher education institutions and that there is no single definition or method for strategic planning. Further, claims for strategic planning methods lack the supporting research necessary to justify their use, especially those claiming a strategic planning percentage-based success rate. The next chapter will center on research design to gather data necessary to support the research questions.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to examine the rationale for strategic planning from the perspective of academic leaders and development officers at public land-grant institutions of higher education in the United States.

#### **Research Design**

Qualitative research begins with a question for which the researcher at least has an intellectual curiosity, if not a passion, for a particular topic where the intentions and perspectives of the human subjects being studied are unknown (Agee, 2009). As a higher education administrator employed at a public research one (R-1) land-grant institution that publicizes a comprehensive strategic plan, understanding the rationale for strategic planning through the lens of academic leaders and development officers is very important to me. This thinking is rooted in the awareness that up to an estimated 70% of colleges and universities in the United States engage in some form of strategic planning (Sevier, 2008). Coupled with a wide range of claims proposing that 50-90% of strategic initiatives fail with evidence for these claims absent (Candido & Santos, 2015), researching the use of strategic planning in higher education institutions is an important topic that will contribute to higher education.

Given the lack of scholarly literature and quality research on the use of strategic planning as a long-range planning tool in higher education, how are we to know the nature of reality with respect to higher education strategic planning? The naturalistic paradigm of inquiry posits that there are multiple constructed realities that can only be

studied holistically. Inquiry into these multiple realities will inevitably diverge with each inquiry raising more questions that need to be answered, such that prediction and control are unlikely outcomes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The naturalist further believes that all entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping and that any hypothesis will always be considered as a “working” hypothesis that changes over time since they are being simultaneously shaped.

In seeking to understand the rationale for strategic planning at LGI’s, the qualitative methodology provides the ability to conduct a naturalistic case study in order to understand the experience of the research participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To conduct a naturalistic case study, interviews are the primary method of data collection, where the researcher explores their own experiences prior to understand and reduce their personal bias by documenting those biases before conducting the interviews (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To further limit bias, the interview protocol included a requirement to not reveal my own perceptions about strategic planning to each interview participant until after the interview was completed. However, in two interviews, the participant did ask what my thoughts were on one or more question, to which I did provide my opinion.

Naturalistic inquiry uses open-ended interview techniques based on the research questions by phrasing questions in such a way that “yes” or “no” responses are minimized. This is an important technique intended to support holistically recognizing the numerous experience dimensions of the rationale for strategic planning among the interview participants so that their responses can be flexible, evolving, and open to revealing shared meaning without a preconceived hypothesis. Further, I minimized my

injection of statements that would create causal notions in the interview that might lead the conversation toward a similar conclusion. At the end of each interview, I asked each participant if something new had occurred in terms of thought or understanding that they might wish to share in an effort to observe ontological authenticity. For the first six interviews, I primarily asked for references to other potential participants for the study as it was very difficult to find participants who met the participant criteria. As a result, the first six interviews did not include the ontological authenticity question since I ran out of time and had told the participants that the interview would not last for longer than one hour.

Participants were offered anonymity in the final research publication in an effort to encourage them to offer responses that reflected their truest opinion toward strategic planning at their respective institution. Anonymity and anonymization are a matter of changing details sufficiently so that the reader cannot identify the individual concerned, but in such a way as not to destroy the social-science research value of the final report (Wengraf, 2001). For this purpose, the methods used to ensure anonymity are described throughout this chapter.

### **Eligible Institutions**

Eligible participants included in the study were first based on institutions with the highest research activity (R-1). The research centered on LGI's with the highest research activity in order to raise the greatest likelihood of identifying the connection between strategic planning and resource allocation coupled with fundraising. According to the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2015), the designation

of “highest research activity” is assigned to doctoral universities that awarded at least 20 research or scholarship doctoral degrees. A list was generated into an excel spreadsheet that included all institutions with both public and private designations. All private institutions were removed from the list, resulting in 81 public R-1 institutions.

The Association of Public & Land-Grant Universities (APLU) (2018) maintains a list of the LGI’s that resulted from the 1862 Morrill Act. This list served as the definitive list of LGI’s that was used as a cross-reference.

The National Science Foundation publishes a list of historical rankings of academic institutions by total research and development expenditures (NSF, 2018). A copy of this list was downloaded into the excel spreadsheet containing the Carnegie Classification list of highest research institutions. Beginning with the highest research activity institutions, each institution was referenced against the Carnegie R-1 public institution classification, followed by the LGI designation from the APLU. Institutions that did not meet both criteria were systematically removed until the top 20 institutions were visible. The list of institutions is described in Table 3.1. Following this table, I describe my methods for reaching the final six institutions, however, no further descriptions are offered to promote institutional anonymity that helps ensure participant anonymity that was offered and accepted by each participant.

**Table 3.1 Top 20 R-1 LGI Institutions by 2016 Research Expenditure**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>2016 R&amp;D Expenditures in U.S. Dollars</b>	<b>R&amp;D Expenditure Rank Among All Institutions</b>
1. University of Wisconsin-Madison	1,157,680	6
2. Cornell University	974,199	12
3. Texas A&M University, College Station	892,718	16
4. The Pennsylvania State University, University Park & Hershey Medical Ctr.	825,561	22
5. The Ohio State University	818,464	20
6. University of Florida	791,294	25
7. University of California, Berkeley	774,255	23
8. Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick	630,212	32
9. University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign	625,180	31
10. Michigan State University	613,369	38
11. Purdue University, West Lafayette	606,302	37
12. The University of Arizona	604,464	33
13. University of Maryland, College Park	539,388	43
14. North Carolina State University	489,918	47
15. University of Georgia	410,345	61
16. University of Kentucky	349,661	68
17. Washington State University	334,082	67
18. Iowa State University	328,385	77
19. University of Hawaii at Manoa	304,476	74
20. University of Nebraska-Lincoln	294,856	79

The list was then further refined to rank the eligible institutions based on endowment assets, which correlates with research question three. The National Center for Education Statistics publishes an “Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System” tool, also known as IPEDS, for the purpose of providing scientific evidence on which to

ground education practice and policy in formats that are useful and accessible to educators, parents, policymakers, researchers, and the public (NCES, IES, 2018).

Using the IPEDS online tool, I created a custom query with the *Endowment assets (year-end) per FTE enrollment* variable in the FY2016 data set. This variable represented the gross investments of endowment funds, term endowment funds, and funds functioning as endowment for the institution and any of its foundations and other affiliated organization per full-time enrolled student (NCES, Glossary, 2018).

To create the query, I entered the top 10 institutions from Table 3.1, excluding Texas A&M University. Texas A&M University (TAMU) was excluded due to my working knowledge of the University as both a current student and an administrator, such that a naturalistic case study conducted for TAMU would likely contain a higher number of my personal biases. The results of this query were presented in the original proposal to the doctoral dissertation committee. However, to ensure institutional and participant anonymity, this table is not displayed and was validated by the doctoral dissertation committee prior to the study to arrive at the institutional selection list. An ordinal ranking comparison of these results were provided in the tables offered to the doctoral dissertation committee.

Each table rank and endowment were multiplied by a common multiplier and added together. The lowest values correlated to the highest combination of R&D and endowment rankings. A multiplier of 1 was used to normalize the data set and a table was used to display the normalized data values to the doctoral dissertation committee.

The final table presented a prioritized ranking of institutions that were selected for the study. Six institutions were chosen as “case study institutions” from among the original population of twenty institutions in rank order using the data in the final table presented to the doctoral dissertation committee as a prioritized list.

During the course of discussion with the doctoral dissertation committee, one institution was removed from the list as their historical land-grant mission had changed over the past several decades and it was thought that this institution would not be generally reflective of most land-grant institutions.

In the process of contacting participants for the study after receiving Institutional Review Board validation for the study, I received three rejections from the same institution. This institution was removed from the institution list, and I moved to the next institution in the list. This resulted in a top six institution list that excluded two eligible institutions that were ranked higher than the final six. Based on review of the mission statements for the six included institutions and the two excluded institutions, little variation existed such that the sample continued to be reliable.

### **Participants**

Potential participants were divided into three categories prior to researching websites for the candidates to ensure the study could address the research questions. These categories were approved by the doctoral dissertation committee during the proposal stage. The first category of participants (C1P) are defined as those individuals who have prior or current experience in a full-time position among the participating institutions list where all or a portion of their responsibility is to manage either the

institution-wide strategic planning process, a unit strategic planning process, or both. Examples of eligible participants in C1P were those responsible for institutional planning, academic program reviews, and institutional research. Participants in C1P were not limited to these titles. The criteria for participation was based on heavy responsibilities associated with strategic planning.

The second category of participants (C2P) are defined as those individuals who have prior or current experience in an executive leadership role that participated in the development, implementation, or assessment process of the strategic and/or unit plan. Examples include Deans, Vice Provosts, Vice CEOs, the Provost, the CEO, or a Board Member. Individuals holding titles outside of the previous examples were excluded, as the view from top academic leaders was determined to be necessary for answering the research questions.

The third category of participants (C3P) are defined as those individuals who have prior or current experience in support of fundraising and government relations activities. Examples include development officers, gift planning officers, government relations officers, and institutional advancement leaders. Individuals holding titles outside of the previous examples were included given the variety of titles and roles associated with fundraising and government relations.

### **Sampling**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer that purposive sampling associated with naturalistic inquiry must be in some sense representative of the population to which it is desired to transfer. Even a simple random sample is representative in the sense that

every element in the population has an equal chance of being chosen. Naturalistic sampling is very different from conventional sampling in that it is based on informational, not statistical, considerations for the purpose of maximizing information as opposed to yielding generalizations with minimal sampling flaws.

The naturalistic sampling approach was used to gain the greatest insight through individuals in each of the three categories of participants. The total population (N) of participating institutions was six. It was assumed that at least one individual existed from C1P, C2P, and C3P at every institution in the population and this was validated after researching the website of each participating institution for eligible participants.

The criteria for selection as a case study institution was given to those institutions where at least one person from C1P, C2P, and C3P agreed to an interview. This equated to a minimum of eighteen telephonic or video-enabled (WebEx) interviews across the six institutions. However, more than eighteen interviews would have taken place if the data analysis indicated that a richness of information was not present such that data saturation did not occur.

When determining the number of participants to interview, the term saturation is often used to represent the point when enough data has been gathered such that additional data is of little use. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) advocated that saturation is the point in data collection and analysis when new information produces little or no change to the codebook. Further, recognizing how many interview participants is enough cannot be adequately determined prior to starting the research as there are no published guidelines or tests of adequacy for estimating the sample size

required to reach saturation in qualitative research (Morse, 1995). As a result, recruiting participants for the interviews occurred across two techniques designed to increase the response rate to reach at least eighteen interviews or until saturation occurred. During the data analysis process later described in this chapter, new categories used to describe data sets were created for the first twelve interviews. Interview number thirteen did not yield new information that had not already be categorized. Interviews fourteen and fifteen yielded one new category each. Interviews sixteen through eighteen provided no additional categories with all information analyzed reflecting information known from earlier interviews. As a result, saturation occurred at interview number 15. The saturation point was mutually determined between the doctoral dissertation chairperson and the researcher following submission by the research and validation from two peer researchers who examined all data collection artifacts.

According to Fowler (2009), the response rate is the number of completed interviews divided by the number of individuals in the study population designated by the sampling procedure to be in the sample. Fowler (2009) further asserts that telephone or personal interview surveys have a common response rate of 30% to 50%, where response rates closer to 50% may be expected. To increase a higher response rate, I browsed the website of each institution to identify potential names for participants. The email address available on the institution's website was used to directly contact the potential participant and request an interview. This technique had been successful for me in the past when conducting graduate research and higher education benchmarking.

This technique required the development of a contact list for each of the case study institutions, which I created using a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. When researching the website of each institution, the tracking list contained the institution name, contact name, contact title, initial contact date, interview date, interview status, website reference links regarding their role, notes regarding their role, the contact email address, and the contact. Once I analyzed a website for potential participants, I sent recruitment emails and noted the initial contact date in the spreadsheet. I also copied the administrative assistant for the potential participant, which was available in the majority of participants. The recruitment message requested a forty-five minute to one-hour interview to limit the burden of participation for each respondent. The message was written in a non-threatening way and followed Institutional Review Board guidelines for human subject research. Participants were offered individual anonymity in the message and this was later discussed with the participant at the beginning of the interview where the participant was given an opportunity to discontinue the interview if desired.

The process of gaining participants was tedious. While eighteen people were successfully interviewed, the overall number of potential participants contacted was thirty-nine, resulting in a response rate of 46%. This rate was expected, however, the process of emailing potential candidates and then waiting on their reply extended the amount of time and effort needed to successfully acquire interview confirmations. Of the 54% who did not commit to an interview, the majority did not respond via email. In subsequent phone calls to their office, they either did not return voicemails or had an administrative assistant contact me to decline the interview.

If only two case study participant categories from either C1P, C2P, or C3P could be secured at a given institution, then the institution could not be used. All three categories of participant at an eligible institution were necessary to address the set of research questions. One institution was abandoned after three rejections since it was clear that it would not be possible to gain a representative sample from C1P, C2P, and C3P categorized participants. This was approved by the doctoral committee chairperson. One institution was nearly abandoned after I had completed interviews from C2P and C3P categories and could not gain a successful confirmation in the C1P category. I was able to use a professional contact at this institution that I had gained as a result of my employment as an administrator at Texas A&M University and a participant was able to be confirmed after several weeks. The overall process was conducted from January 26, 2019 and concluded with the final interview confirmation on May 14, 2019 once eighteen interviews had been successfully conducted.

The length of time needed to secure the interviews was longer than expected as I did not anticipate the amount of time needed to wait for confirming participants from their email response and the level of difficulty needed to schedule a one-hour time slot on their calendar. Due to the participants being mostly executive leaders, there was typically a three to five-week lead time needed to gain access to an interview. There were also delays associated with the need to reschedule interviews, which occurred five times as higher priority executive meetings and priorities were cited as reasons for rescheduling.

## **Instruments**

Data was collected from each forty-five minute to one-hour interview. Each telephonic conversation with video was transcribed using the field notes technique. The conversation was not recorded as part of ensuring participant anonymity. Each participant was given complete freedom to guide the conversation toward their individual experience. Interviews in the study utilized seven structured questions with the interviewee guiding the conversation toward their own experience in an effort to embrace the naturalistic approach. The seven questions are as follows:

1. What is the primary purpose for developing a strategic plan at the institution or unit level (e.g. college/division/etc.)?
2. How are institution-wide and unit strategic plans linked to the budget and resource allocation process?
3. Can you give me an example of how strategic planning is linked to fundraising?  
When a positive response is received, this question is supported by subsidiary questions:
  - a. What roles use the strategic plan in support of fundraising activities (e.g. CEOs, Provosts, Deans, etc.)?
  - b. How are strategic plans used to support fundraising activities?
  - c. When funds associated with strategic plans are received, how does this impact the priority of strategic plan initiatives or the budget allocation process?

4. How are institution-wide strategic plans used to align work activities to the goals of the CEO or Provost or how are unit strategic plans used to align work activities to the goals of the unit leader (e.g. Deans, Vice-CEOs, Vice-Provosts, etc.)?
5. Are there examples of how institution-wide or unit strategic plans are used to influence government or legislative bodies?
6. How do you know if a strategic plan was successful at your institution and what are the measures for determining success?

To limit bias, I used an interview protocol that did not reveal my own perceptions on the topic to the participants until after the interview is completed. With me as the research instrument, I acknowledge that I have multiple biases. My first bias was that I believed strategic planning at LGI's are ineffective when viewed through the lens of implementation success, however, I believe that they hold a form of value to the University that allows for their continued utilization, even if the University is unaware of what that value actually is. There were participants who asked me what my opinion was toward strategic planning effectiveness and I did share this bias. Participant interest in my opinion commonly occurred at the end of the interview after the ontological authenticity question.

My second bias was the belief that strategic plans are often used as a symbolic representation of executive competence for CEOs or Provosts during the early years of their tenure, which was not validated as later shown in Chapter four.

My third bias was that strategic plans are used as a solution to improve organizational effectiveness. Despite the current beliefs among external consultants,

authors, and companies who advocate for the use of strategic planning to promote organizational effectiveness, my own personal experience is that strategic plans, in their entirety, are rarely used to guide decision-making and measurable improvements in an organization.

Prior to interviewing, an interview template was created and used consistently for each interview session. However, there were participants that asked me to explain a question in greater detail. This was common among C3P participants who worked in fundraising or government relations positions as they typically were not involved closely in the strategic planning process, rather, they were involved in seeking support for strategic plan outcomes among their constituents.

At the completion of each interview, a pseudonym was assigned to each interviewee. Further, a reference code that separated C1P, C2P, and C3P was labeled in a table that I maintained.

### **Data Collection**

Data was collected through telephonic interviews and where participants agreed, the WebEx online communication tool was used as this offered video connection to create a more personal conversation environment that is less apparent when conducting an interview via telephone only. The use of WebEx and telephone calls were chosen in order to connect with participants at LGI's in distant geographical states using a readily available and low-cost technology that worked with their schedule as all participants were in some form of an executive leadership role.

During each of the eighteen interviews, the purpose of the dissertation was read to the participants along with information associated with the IRB statements. All participants agreed to continue with the interview following the obligatory IRB statements. After reading each question during the interviews, I rapidly transcribed statements using wireless keyboard into Microsoft Word. This was possible through the use of a Logitech wireless headset and microphone that allowed me to type without holding a telephone or computer-integrated microphone.

At the conclusion of each interview, the resulting document was referred to as the original interview transcript. This document contained spelling and grammatical mistakes without data validation, as the data was only in a “collected” state. Each file was stored in an encrypted online folder using Dropbox where the document awaited data validation.

### **Data Validation**

Each original interview transcript contained spelling and grammatical mistakes that resulted from rapidly typing interview statements. Within two days of each interview, while information from the interview was still recent from a neurological perspective, I reviewed the original interview transcript and edited spelling errors while correcting grammatical statements to ensure that sentences and statements reflected the intention of the participant. The resulting document was then saved with a new file name as the *Summarized Interview Transcript*. This document was then sent to the participant with the request to review the document and provide edits, strike statements, and validate the accuracy of the document.

Participants were asked to respond within seven days of receiving the summarized interview transcript. Documents were sent via the Texas A&M University FileX system as an encrypted file to ensure confidentiality and to remove the message from record discovery in the event that my email mailbox was reviewed as part of an open records request so as to ensure anonymity of the participant. A separate instruction was sent via email to each participant with information on how to access the encrypted transcript along with an encryption key.

At the completion of receiving edits or the expiration for making edits by the participant, each summarized interview transcript was used to create a new coded document. These documents were placed in a *Transcribed and Coded Interview Documents* folder. In review of each statement, individual statement numbers were created that reflected a central thought expressed by the participant. I then coded each statement number with a theme and category. In parallel, a *Major Themes and Categories* table was used to ensure that duplicate categories were not created. At the conclusion of coding each *Transcribed and Coded Interview* document, I added each statement with the respective theme, category, participant code, and institution reference to a *Combined Participant Quote Spreadsheet*. This document was used for data analysis and a supplemental *Data Analysis\_Theme\_Number\_Theme Name* spreadsheet displayed each unique theme using data from the combined spreadsheet.

Of the eighteen participants, six participants offered edits within the seven-day period, which were incorporated into the summarized transcript and also re-sent to the participant to confirm correction. The remaining twelve participants either responded via

email with a short confirmation or did not respond to the email. While there is the possibility for non-response bias from participants who did not respond, a peer review was conducted by two scholars who reviewed the *Transcribed and Coded Interview* document, the *Combined Participant Quote* spreadsheet, and the *Data Analysis\_Theme\_Number\_Theme Name* spreadsheet did not indicate such bias. The reviewers were asked to conduct a data analysis validation that included a complete review of the transcription, coding, and theming processes. No evidence of inaccuracy in the transcription, coding, or theming process between the participants who did not respond for confirmation of their interview transcription as compared to those who did respond were noted by the peer reviewers.

### **Coding & Demographics of the Sample Group**

Of the eighteen participants, nine participants served as executive administrators holding a Vice Provost or CEO title, six held the title of Dean, two held the title of Director, and one held the title of Chief of Staff. Each participant confirmed experience in either the planning, implementation, or assessment component of the strategic plan development lifecycle.

Of the eighteen participants, eleven held a terminal degree in their field of expertise, and all Dean's interviewed held a terminal degree. The age ranges or gender of the participants were not collected. Both the title reference of the individual and the terminal degree status are not provided to promote participant anonymity.

During data analysis, strategic plan roles were divided into strategic planning leader, strategic plan implementer, strategic plan participant, and strategic plan advocate.

A strategic planning leader is an individual who directed the development of either an institution-wide strategic plan or unit-wide strategic plan or served on an executive committee that guided the development of the strategic plan. A strategic plan participant served during the development of the strategic plan and has experience relevant to the study. A strategic plan implementer is an individual that was charged with the implementation of one or more outcomes from the strategic plan. A strategic plan advocate is a person who attempted to use the strategic plan in their role at the University to support one or more initiatives important to the University. Participants may serve in more than one role, however, only their primary role as noted from the interview is referenced in Chapter four.

The order of the six institutions were not organized alphabetically and were input at random into a participant tracking sheet. The order of each institution was placed in an encrypted and private spreadsheet where each institution was given a corresponding letter code, where institution one equaled letter “a,” the second institution equaled letter “b” and so forth. Independent verification was conducted by two peer reviewers to confirm the correlation of the institution to the attribute. This coding approach was intended to protect the identity of each participant as well as their institution. The table is not shared to ensure anonymity.

Table 3.1 displays an anonymized view of the attribute correlation that does not contain the actual institution names. The participant category is displayed with options C1P, C2P, and C3P. This constituted character values two through four of the participant codes. Each strategic plan role is then listed with their corresponding letter and

constituted the fifth character value in the participant code. The institution letter code, correlated from the separate participant tracking sheet, is the sixth character value.

**Table 3.2 Participant Attribute Key – Respondent Codes**

<b>Attribute</b>	<b>Option 1</b>	<b>Option 2</b>	<b>Option 3</b>	<b>Option 4</b>	<b>Option 5</b>	<b>Option 6</b>
Category	C1P	C2P	C3P	N/A	N/A	N/A
Strategic Plan Role	Planning Leader (L)	Planning Participant (P)	Plan Implementer (I)	Plan Advocate (A)	N/A	N/A
Institution Letter Code	A	B	C	D	E	F

Table 3.2 provides an integrated view of the respondent code table. The interview number is the order in which each participant was interviewed beginning on March 5, 2019, with participant one and ending on May 23, 2019, with participant eighteen. This table has been modified to exclude other references to ensure participant anonymity. The table was validated by two peer reviewers.

**Table 3.3 Respondent Code Table**

<b>Interview Number</b>	<b>Category Code</b>	<b>Strategic Plan Role Code</b>	<b>Institution Code</b>	<b>Resulting Reference Code</b>	<b>Interview Date</b>
1	C3P	I	B	1C3PIB	3/5/2019
2	C1P	A	E	2C1PAE	3/5/2019
3	C3P	A	D	3C3PAD	3/6/2019
4	C3P	I	C	4C3PIC	3/7/2019
5	C1P	L	A	5C1PLA	3/8/2019
6	C1P	P	C	6C1PPC	3/11/2019
7	C2P	P	B	7C1PIB	3/13/2019
8	C3P	I	A	8C3PIA	3/28/2019
9	C2P	L	B	9C2PLB	3/28/2019
10	C2P	P	D	10C2PPD	4/12/2019
11	C3P	A	F	11C3PAF	4/17/2019
12	C1P	P	F	12C1PPF	4/18/2019
13	C3P	A	E	13C3PAE	4/28/2019
14	C1P	P	D	14C1PPD	5/9/2019
15	C2P	L	A	15C2PLA	5/13/2019
16	C2P	I	C	16C2PIC	5/14/2019
17	C2P	L	E	17C2PLE	5/17/2019
18	C2P	I	F	18C2PIF	5/23/2019

## **Data Analysis**

Using the summarized interview transcripts that were validated by the participants, I created a new document titled as the *Analyzed Transcript*. This file contained a three-column table that reflected the statement number, the actual statement, and a category. I reviewed the summarized transcript and segmented statements that were often a collection of sentences that conveyed a specific thought that the participant wanted to convey.

In parallel with this process, I created a *Major Themes and Categories* document that was used to document categories and develop a definition for each category based on the intent of the participants. Once the analyzed transcript document was successfully segmented into multiple statement numbers and the corresponding statement, I reviewed the document from the beginning, analyzing each statement and reflecting on how to categorize the statement. I then created a category in the category column of the analyzed transcript document and simultaneously entered that category into the major themes and categories document. I then created a definition for that category and repeated this process continually each time a document was analyzed.

The first seven documents were exceedingly slow and tedious, as the segmentation of statements and the creation of definitions required close to four hours of effort per document to complete the segmentation, identify a category, and develop a definition for each category. It also required that I return to the literature review of this study to effectively form definitions for the categories, which resulted in adding four new articles to the literature review section that were not offered in the proposal.

Documents eight through twelve began to reuse existing categories that resulted from the first seven documents while also creating new categories, which improved the time needed for analysis to approximately two and a half hours. Interview number thirteen did not yield new information that could not already be categorized. Interviews fourteen and fifteen yielded one new category each. Interviews sixteen through eighteen provided no additional categories with all information analyzed reflecting information known from earlier interviews. As a result, saturation occurred at interview number fifteen.

The supplemental major themes and categories file documented a definition for each of the categories. This file is now collated into Table 3.3 Major Themes and Categories. Each definition is an original definition created by the researcher based on the data analysis activity using participant interviews and inspired by an understanding of the previous literature review. The table outlines three major themes and eighteen categories that were developed with a subsequent definition. Prior to peer review, there were fifty-two categories and six themes. I reduced the themes and categories down to ensure that there was as little duplication and overlap as possible while ensuring the intent of the participant was reflected from the original interview.

The three major themes and categories are used to structure the research findings in Chapter four using participant quotes to validate the categories.

**Table 3.4 Major Themes and Categories**

<b>Major Theme</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Strategic Funding	Donor Participation	The practice of involving current or prospective donors to participate in the strategic planning and implementation process for the purpose of gaining their support to generate philanthropic revenue or other benefits. This practice also reflects the influence, positive or negative, that accompanies this process.
Strategic Funding	Plan as Organizational Unit Fundraiser	The concept of using the strategic plan outcomes for the purpose of gaining support from any stakeholder outside of the university to generate revenue for a specific organizational unit (e.g. College of Agriculture, Government Relations, Donor Relations, etc.)
Strategic Funding	Outcomes from Fundraising	The outcomes associated with the use of philanthropic support to address strategic planning priorities.
Strategic Plan Development	Role of the Executive Leader	This category describes both positive and negative aspects of the impact that an executive leader, namely the CEO, has over the strategic planning and implementation process.
Strategic Plan Development	Plan as Aspirational	The idea that strategic plans should avoid the use of tactical objectives or be all encompassing such that explicitly defined outcomes span the entire University. The idea further offers that a strategic plan may never be “implemented.” This category occurs when the term “aspirational” or a related synonym was used by the participant.
Strategic Plan Development	Planning and Crisis Response	The use of strategic planning to address a perceived problem with the University (e.g. financial crisis, effectiveness, accreditation, etc.).

**Table 3.4 Continued**

<b>Major Theme</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Strategic Plan Development	Planning Process	The institutional strategic planning process that includes creating the initial, institution-wide strategic plan to comprehensively cover the entire university
Strategic Plan Development	Executive Vision & Purpose of the Plan	The guiding vision set by a governing board, executive leader(s), or committee outlining the future-state of the University and the purpose of the strategic plan with respect to the future-state. This includes providing guidelines to organizational units for developing their strategic plan(s).
Strategic Plan Development	External Plan Integration	External plan integration refers to the incorporation of institutional strategic plan alignment to higher-level plans (e.g. University System or Governing Board-Authored Plans, State Government Strategic Plans, Federal Government Strategic Plans, etc.).
Strategic Plan Implementation and Assessment	Cultural of Shared Governance	The cultural expectation for shared governance by members of the university toward strategic planning. This category covers the depth of involvement desired by prospective planning participants, traditional vs. non-traditional strategic planning concepts, and the cultural paradigms associated with implementation among the campus. This includes the concept of decentralized organizational structures posing a challenge to developing a unified vision.
Strategic Plan Implementation and Assessment	Plan as Marketing Tool	The use of the strategic plan as a marketing tool through one or more form of publications designed to positively influence individuals outside of the University.

**Table 3.4 Continued**

<b>Major Theme</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Strategic Plan Implementation and Assessment	Executive Advocacy	The practice whereby executive leaders such as the CEO, Provost, or their subordinates are charged with implementing or advocating for support of one or more components of the institutional strategic plan.
Strategic Plan Implementation and Assessment	Relationships	This category refers to the idea that strategic plan implementation requires significant skill in developing, maintaining, and using relationships to execute the plan.
Strategic Plan Implementation and Assessment	Organizational Unit Planning	The process by which organizational units develop strategic plans and engage stakeholders.
Strategic Plan Implementation and Assessment	Organizational Unit Plan Alignment	This category refers to the tools, techniques, and processes by which organizational units align their plans with elements of the institution-wide strategic plan. Such plans contain tactical or operational objectives. Such plans may also be reference to as a “strategic implementation plan.”
Strategic Plan Implementation and Assessment	Strategic Investment Program	The use of a formalized strategic investment program where an executive leader and/or committee utilizes a process for requesting funding allotments or grants to fund projects intended to implement a component of the strategic plan.
Strategic Plan Implementation and Assessment	Institutional & Organizational-Unit Plan Performance Indicators	The concept of using unique qualitative or quantitative metrics to assess the implementation of institutional or organizational-unit strategic plan outcomes.
Strategic Plan Implementation and Assessment	Challenges to Assessment and the Failings of Strategic Planning	The perspective of an individual as to why they believe strategic plans are difficult to assess.

## CHAPTER IV

### **Research Rigor**

I sought to establish transferability and credibility in the research using Lincoln & Guba's (1985) principals. To sustain credibility, I relied on two peer researchers who examined data collection techniques, documents, and statements divided into themes and categories. To promote transferability, the readers ability to utilize the findings in applied research settings, I described the assumptions that were central to the research and the research setting, highlighting where the basis was validated or invalidated.

To establish credibility, an audit log using the participant reference code for each original interview transcript, summarized interview transcript, and analyzed transcript file was maintained while collecting the data, interpreting the findings, and reporting the findings. All changes to the file were tracked and given for review to two peer researchers at the conclusion of the data collection process from the 18 interviews.

To sustain credibility, the two peer researchers conducted a data audit to examine the data collection and analysis procedures. Procedural records were audited by reviewing for consistent data template usage, sorting and theming process adherence, and the correct placement of data into the themes based on keywords. I provided this to the peer reviewers by creating five spreadsheets, one for each major theme, that included a consolidated set of statements per theme with a participant reference code that provided a simplified view for them to compare against the category definitions and summarized interview transcripts.

The peer review activities were completed on September 10, 2019, and September 14, 2019 independently by each researcher. No new themes or categories were suggested by the peer reviewers. Only minor edits, such as participant category labeling were suggested and these were incorporated into the respective documents. Formal peer review findings were submitted to the doctoral committee chairperson.

### **Research Findings**

The purpose of the research was to explore the justification, or rationale, for strategic planning through the lens of resource allocation and work activities in a limited number of higher education land-grant institutions (LGI) in the United States. My field research consisted of interviews with executive leaders at six public land-grant institutions in the United States with very high research activity.

In addition to the findings that result from data analysis, an anonymized characterization of each case study institution with a fictional name is provided. In order to protect the anonymity of the participants who agreed to be in the study, I have described characteristics found in each of the case study institutions without attributing those institutions to participants. Both the institution is anonymized as is the participant and their correlation to a specific institution.

## **The Case Study Institutions**

### *Institution 1 – Grand State University*

Grand State University (GSU) is a public land-grant institution founded in the late 1800's with a total student population near 70,000. GSU utilizes a multi-year institutional strategic plan that has direct sponsorship from the highest chief executive officer (CEO) role, and is promoted as their initiative.

The GSU culture readily embraces the traditional strategic planning approach that involves a large number of stakeholders in the strategic planning process to include faculty, staff, students, board members, community members, and business leaders. Numerous committees are formed and managed to oversee the strategic planning process. Each organizational unit is required to develop a strategic plan that aligns with the institutional strategic plan with the expectation of publishing organizational unit plans publicly. Organizational unit plans are also reviewed by a formally managed office that facilitates strategic plan development, alignment to the institutional plan, and assessment of performance measures that occur on a periodic basis.

GSU is not very different from its peer institutions with respect to institutional strategic plan themes and aspirations. The common strategic plan tenants of teaching and learning, research, community, access and affordability, and stewardship of State-funded resources are readily and prominently published. The plan contains a “branded-name” with several printable publications and brochures that can easily be shared as marketing or promotional materials.

## *Institution 2 – Big State University*

Big State University (BSU) is a public land-grant institution founded in the late 1800's. BSU has a student population just over 40,000 students, however, it is the smallest institution in terms of student population among the six case study institutions.

BSU utilizes a multi-year institutional strategic plan that has direct sponsorship from the CEO role. While the plan is promoted as the CEO's initiative, a very pronounced message of shared governance and the incorporation of many voices beyond that of the CEO and executive leaders are promoted. The CEO has also indicated that the plan will be used to guide priority setting and decision-making without the expectation that the plan will serve as executive endorsement for the implied projects in the plan.

Historically, BSU has not had a culture that embraced strategic planning, nor does it require organizational units to develop strategic plans. In the most recent development of its institutional strategic plan, BSU offered extensive ways for faculty, staff, and students to be involved in the planning process with a strong focus on hearing faculty and student voices in the planning process.

While the BSU institutional strategic plan contains some of the common tenants of teaching and learning, research, and affordability, the plan is unique among the other institutions studied through its strong focus on diversity, inclusivity, social justice, and global citizenship with the overall goal of its graduates impacting the state, nation, and world through its unique commitments. There are no references to increasing research dollars, attracting more students, or surpassing peer institutions.

### *Institution 3 – Shining Tower University*

Shining Tower University (STU) is a public land-grant institution founded in the late 1800's. STU has a student population just over 40,000 students and is the second smallest institution in terms of student population among the six case study institutions based on its exact student count.

There is no single comprehensive strategic plan document or set of materials that are publicly published, however, the presentation of website materials is rich in graphics, videos, and attractive marketing points that would encourage attendance or donor contribution to STU through a clever marketing branded-name for the strategic plan. It is unclear from website materials if the CEO is involved in or endorses the STU strategic plan since the website centers on a variety of positive accomplishments at STU that may have little to do with the use of a strategic plan. There are no references to committees or a description of the process utilized to develop the plan. Through participant interviews, it was learned that a strategic plan for STU does exist and was developed by the CEO in collaboration with the governing board.

STU's culture previously embraced the traditional strategic planning process that projected multi-year strategic plans with a formalized method for engaging the University community, however, the most recent CEO changed the process and engaged the governing board as the primary source for input with the intended purpose of a simplified "roadmap" intended to be implemented. Decentralized strategic plans located within individual Colleges now compromise the bulk of strategic planning found at STU, however, organizational units are not required to develop a strategic plan.

#### *Institution 4 – Open Book University*

Open Book University (OBU) is a public land-grant institution founded in the 1800's and has the median student population size among the six case study institutions with a student body just over 50,000. Like many state-supported institutions, OBU has struggled financially in recent years and transitioned to a strategic planning process connected to the budget planning process.

The CEO of the University is not formally involved in the strategic plan process based on website publications. There is a branded strategic plan website, however, it is the most basic among all case study institutions reviewed. There are some graphical displays of accomplishments loosely connected to the strategic plan via a separate website.

The culture of the institution toward strategic planning changed as a result of budget challenges in the past. OBU now utilizes an annual planning process that is fully integrated into the budget process. As a result, there is not a process used to engage faculty, staff, or students for the institutional strategic plan. However, each organizational unit (College or Division) is encouraged to engaging stakeholders as part of the annual budget proposal and strategic alignment process. As a result, strategic plans across OBU are diverse and unique to the mission and needs of individual Colleges or Divisions with much of the influence in the strategic planning process occurring among Deans.

### *Institution 5 – Public Good University*

Public Good University (PGU) is a public land-grant institution founded in the late 1800's with a student population near 45,000. PGU utilizes the traditional multi-year strategic plan approach with endorsement by the Chief Academic Officer, the Provost.

The PGU culture embraces the traditional multi-decade strategic planning approach that involves a large number of stakeholders in the strategic planning process and includes a guiding vision set by the Provost that is then passed to committees that are involved in the strategic planning process. Organizational units are not required to develop a strategic plan; however, most units maintain a plan as a result of the long-standing culture that is in place at PGU. Organizational unit plans, when developed, are encouraged to align with the institutional plan and there are cases where some organizational unit plans are funded better than other plans that do not align.

PGU is not very different from its peer institutions with respect to institutional strategic plan themes and aspirations. The common strategic plan tenants of teaching and learning, research, community, access and affordability, and stewardship of state-funded resources are readily and prominently published. More so than any other case study institution, PGU strongly promotes stewardship of state-funded resources and the overall value of the institution from an affordability perspective.

PGU does not embrace the marketing element of strategic planning as the institutional strategic plan is presented in a basic and formal way with limited graphics.

### *Institution 6 – Morrill Act University*

Morrill Act University (MAU) is a public land-grant institution founded in the late 1800's. MAU has the largest student population among the six case study institutions with a student population well over 80,000, though not on a single campus. The CEO endorses the institutional strategic plan publicly and periodically as part of a requirement to do so with the governing board.

MAU embraces both the traditional multi-year strategic plan process as well as an integrated and required organizational-unit strategic planning process. A formalized office manages and coordinates both the institutional strategic planning process and the organizational-unit planning process. This office also publishes guidelines for strategic alignment between unit plans and institutional plans. The office is responsible for strategic plan assessment and evaluation with clear and periodic deadlines for submission of numerous strategic planning, implementation, and assessment documents. Organizational-unit strategic plans are expected to align their respective initiatives to budget planning, utilize performance indicators, and publish plan progress.

The institutional plan website contains graphics and videos related to the strategic planning process, however, it is less centered on marketing and more focused on how to conduct strategic planning and engage stakeholders in the process. MAU encourages strategic plan implementation through the utilization of a funding mechanism whereby organizational units can apply for funds to accomplish unit-level strategic plan initiatives that will align with institutional plan outcomes using a process that is separate from the annual budget process. Among all case study institutions

reviewed, MAU has the most comprehensive, complex, and formal commitment to institutional and organizational unit strategic planning.

### **Institutional Strategic Plan Topics**

There were a variety of critical strategic plan topics raised throughout the eighteen interviews across the six institutions: access and affordability, resource stewardship, teaching and learning, and research related goals. Participants responded with very similar challenges that the strategic plan was intended to address while answering questions. I will briefly explore each critical participant topic found among all institutions and refer to information from their public websites to correlate participant references.

There were several strategic plan topics that were uniquely raised by specific institutions that were not found among all six institutions. Topics referenced by two or more institutions, but not all six institutions, include online education, diversity and inclusion as separate from the topic of access, health care goals in the context of institutions who have a healthcare mission, State-specific goals unique to the State served by the land-grant institution, and science-technology-engineering-math (STEM) goals. These goals will not be explored as the focus of this chapter is intended to surface commonality in the strategic plan theme findings.

### **Theme 1 – Strategic Fundraising**

Brint (2005) proposed the concept that strategic planning processes and strategic plans themselves may be used to support external fundraising efforts. Strategic plans can be shaped in such a way that they are used to influence prospective donors toward a

donation by highlighting strategic plan initiatives that uniquely appeal to those prospective donors. The research findings present the results from all of the institutions in categories.

The third research question was specifically designed to understand the relationship between strategic planning and fundraising activities. Strategic fundraising as a theme categorically includes institutional fundraising and donor participation, use of the plan as an organizational-unit fundraiser, and use of the plan as an institutional funding redirection tool.

#### *Institutional Fundraising & Donor Participation*

Institutional fundraising and donor participation as a category within the research findings reflect the practice of using a strategic plan for fundraising among donors, and in some cases, involving current or prospective donors to participate in the strategic planning process for the purpose of gaining their support.

The use of the strategic plan for fundraising was found among all institutions. At Morrill Act University (MAU), a Dean claimed a connection with strategic plans, fundraising, and donors through their experience with the CEO.

The CEO directly linked the fundraising effort to the strategic plan. MAU previously had a [amount removed to ensure anonymity] fundraising program and our current CEO decided that the fundraising should be working on driving support for the strategic plan. Each of the priorities, themes, and principles are organized around the donors. The capital campaign itself was directly linked to the timeline of the strategic plan. They aimed for an average of [amount removed to ensure anonymity] a year and it is tied directly to the strategic plan and that could include scholarships. Donors want to give money to something that wouldn't get done without their intervention.

The MAU strategic planning executive highlighted how the Provost and CEO selected a small number of important strategic priorities from the institutional strategic plan when engaging with donors.

We like to say that our current campaign for fundraising is closely aligned with the strategic plan. The CEO has three strategic priorities for the campaign (access to education, transformative experiences, etc.). When our Provost and CEO began going out to donors to talk about the campaign, they use the strategic plan as the launching point to move the conversation forward.

The Grand State University (GSU) executive responsible for government relations described how they use the strategic plan to drive the GSU fundraising campaign.

There is a department that does coordinate the strategic plan to fundraising campaigns and they are good colleagues of mine. They use the strategic plan to drive their campaign planning. People want to invest in things that are going to make a difference. In the same way that we say to our government contacts that GSU is a good investment, they work closely with the colleges and Deans to ensure that this message is communicated in a cohesive way across the University.

While Open Book University (OBU) maintains a brief institutional strategic plan document, they do connect strategic goals with donors. The executive leader for advancement offered the following insight.

One of the things that capital campaigns do is that they create a window in time in the university where they drive strategic planning. This makes you step back and find what the big ideas are that the university wants for the next twenty years. A lot of times this has to be led by the CEO, because fundraising is tied to this, the fundraising part of the organization can help drive that conversation so we can find the resources necessary to execute that plan. Finding a donor to name an air conditioning unit is hard, but finding a donor to establish a new chair in a Bioethics program is much more possible. You have to marry the vision of the university and the colleges. We find what sparks a passion for you and we build a capital campaign for the strategic plan.

Planning for capital campaigns can actually help CEOs and Deans to sharpen

their message, their bragging points, and then they can communicate and articulate those to potential donors so they can get money for those. Planning for capital campaigns help us to drive this process and show a return on investment. For every \$1.50 you give me, I will bring you \$10 as a return on your money. So the question is where to find these.

Shining Tower University (STU), which utilizes a CEO-driven strategic planning approach, still leverages the strategic plan as a tool to guide fundraising and endowment spending. The STU executive leader responsible for development shared the following.

They [strategic plan and fundraising] are definitely linked here at STU. Certainly at the institution level. Here, like a lot of large and older research institutions, we have resources from a variety of sources, one of which is the endowment. Our institution has been very deliberate and very focused on how we can use the funds from the endowment. Sometimes we think and we know what our strategic plan is and we imagine what it can be, and use it as a guide.

For example, one of our colleges had a family that made a significant commitment to the college. They just said at that time, to use it for your priorities. Since then, the endowment has grown significantly. By having this flexibility and having those external resources, that College has been able to utilize these resources in their strategic planning and thinking as compared to other colleges who don't have such an endowment. If a college has to rely on student fees or state appropriations, those things are variable and depend on enrollment. The longevity of programs from the strategic plan are at risk, but by having an endowment, you can think about things differently.

Across all six institutions, at least two or more participants from each institution provided examples of institutional fundraising activities that used the strategic plan to engage donors. The third research question that sought to understand whether or not a connection between strategic planning and fundraising existed was positively answered in the findings across all of the institutions as one or more participant from each institution was able to provide a specific example that connected strategic planning with fundraising.

### *Plan as Organizational-Unit Fundraiser*

In prior sections, the research findings explored the use of the institutional strategic plan at the university-wide level. Organizational-unit strategic plans can also be used to gain support from any stakeholder outside of the university to generate revenue for a specific organizational unit (e.g. College of Agriculture, Office of Research, other colleges or departments within the university, etc.).

Participants across all of the studied institutions indicated that organizational-unit strategic plans were used to raise funds. The Morrill Act University (MAU) executive leader for development stated the following.

Deans use the institutional plan and will align their own rhetoric to specific initiatives in their College plans. Deans are self-serving in their approach to fundraising, since they need to raise money for their college, which is a good thing. A Dean might say, this is how the specific objectives in our college fit into the overall strategic plan for the University and uses the capital campaign effort for their College.

A Public Good University Dean shared their use of an advancement group to promote fundraising that creates a separate strategic plan within the organizational-unit strategic plan.

As a department chair for sixteen years, and a dean for seven years, our overall college strategic plan alone is not what drives our success in fundraising. What we do is have a separate advancement group strategic plan that is focused on how we can help the college excel and indirectly support the strategic plan. For example, supporting the student experience could be one. In the advancement group strategic plan, we might focus on increasing scholarships for students and then have a series of initiatives on how we are going to do that (e.g. talking with alumni, etc.). So, we have a separate plan that supports the Colleges strategic plan.

An Open Book University (OBU) Dean confirmed external fundraising using their organizational-unit strategic plan.

For our college, we looked at facilities tied to the student experience and looked at how to deliver a teaching and learning environment to provide the best student experience that we could. Our fundraising was tied to the strategic plan with this specific item, we got the money, and built the building.

We also looked at increasing the number of endowed faculty positions. It was part of our campaign and we were successful in pushing our agenda forward. The one clarity that emerged is really about resources wherever you may get them. These are just different groups where you might use the same document or approach.

Like institutional plans being used for fundraising, the research findings indicate that Colleges use their organizational-unit strategic plan objectives as part of their effort to engage donors for the purpose of fundraising. Of the eighteen participants interviewed, fourteen participants provided an example of fundraising at the unit-level across each of the institutions, equating to a confirmation rate of 78% among participants occurring at 100% of the institutions in this study.

#### *Outcomes from Fundraising*

The third research question was intended to identify if strategic plans were used as a fundraising tool and contained a sub-question designed to understand the impact of outcomes associated with the use of philanthropic support to address strategic planning priorities and the phenomenon of funding redirection. An example of funding redirection is when an organizational-unit is either successful or unsuccessful in their fundraising, resulting in the need for either more or less central funds in the next budget cycle.

A former Big State University (BSU) Dean believed that there was some form of impact that slightly penalized successful fundraising associated with the strategic plan.

When significant money does come in to a College, over time (e.g. 5+ years), there would be a little bit of a tilt of resources away from that College since they were so effective at raising funds. BSU is a very justice minded place, so those doing well with fundraising tend to have a lesser place at the table when they are doing well.

The BSU executive leader responsible for academic planning offered a detail view into the culture.

From working here long enough, I can say that there is a fear that you will be penalized by a corresponding offset to central support when you raise those funds. The reality is that this is not so much true and that the funds are then redirected to whatever college needed those funds. There are definitely haves and have-nots. Some of the haves say leave us alone and don't bother us, whereas others are very good campus citizens and recognize that their brand benefits from being a part of BSU.

Many are good corporate citizens and have no trouble with helping to subsidize other schools from a central perspective where it is needed, however, there are some schools that are not. For the most part, the reality is that things don't change that much, but the perception is that you are penalized from bringing in those funds. It's not just a fear since those extramural funds are taxed at a certain rate that is then used to help support other schools that generate less revenue.

The Public Good University (PGU) executive leader responsible for strategic planning believed that the Provost and CEO desired to encourage strategic plan fundraising.

The Provost and CEO want to incentivize fundraising, so the last thing that they want to do is take it away or cut your base budget if you earn more. They are in growth mode all of the time. It is more of what can we do to improve and continuing to move the base budgets toward growth or stability.

A Grand State University (GSU) Dean did not believe that successful fundraising counted against organizational-units.

A person's success does not count against them, but it doesn't get them any extra points. It does allow us to do some things that we had not thought we could do that wouldn't be done within the operating budget. In our case, we are looking at general funds (revenue from tuition and state subsidy), so there is a small amount

of funding for strategic initiatives, but usually nothing that has a major impact on operational funding. So, I would say that I don't believe there is an impact either positive or negative. It's really the needs and priorities that should be driving the funding allocation.

The Morrill Act University (MAU) executive leader for strategic planning keeps the strategic plan related fundraising process separate from the budget process through their strategic investment program and the consistent use of "seed grants."

There is no relationship to budget planning and their gift. In one example, a Dean gained \$30M from donors, but there is no connection. The Vice CEO for Development is also at the table for funding the seed grants. They will often ask if they need to get external funding from donors instead of the seed grant funds. So, when that is the case, they will ask the development officer or their team to meet with them.

The research findings do not provide evidence to support a clear conclusion across all institutions in the study to connect budget planning with strategic planning. Among the participants, most did not have experience with the budget planning process and the connection to strategic plan related fundraising. When answers were provided to either positively or negatively affirm if there was a relationship, additional statements were often added that bracketing it as their opinion on how they thought it was happening as opposed to their factual confirmation that it was or was not occurring.

The research findings presented on this topic will not be covered as part of the conclusions offered, as the results are inconclusive. A supplemental study focused toward budget officers, Deans, advancement officers, and related roles that have experience with fundraising and budgeting would offer a clearer understanding of the relationship.

## **Theme 2 – Strategic Plan Development**

Using the data analysis findings from participant interviews, strategic plan development encompasses the planning process as well as non-planning related components that influence the planning process, not just a plan action to achieve a goal or a goal set.

Strategic plan development as a theme categorically includes the role of the executive leader, use of the institutional plan as an aspirational guide, using the institutional or organizational-unit plan as a solutioning tool, components of the planning process, the phenomenon associated with plan excitement, the debate surrounding strategic planning, the executive purpose of the plan, and integrating the institutional strategic plan with external strategic plans.

### *Role of the Executive Leader*

In three of six institutions studied, the role of the executive leader was directly referenced as playing an important part when developing either an institutional or organizational-unit strategic plan.

At Shining Tower University (STU), more references to the role of the executive leader were offered by the participants than any other institution studied. The current CEO at STU did not use a broad participatory approach to planning, but rather took a more corporate approach only involving senior leadership at the board-level in planning. The executive leader responsible for development at STU offered the following.

The new CEO came in, took a step back, looked to each of the leaders, and asked them what the big thing was and gave them authority to close [on those initiatives and gifts]. The CEO said to a Dean, in a perfect world, if you can think big and bold, what would you do and how would I support you? They made it

publicly stated that they would not roll out a strategic plan yet. They did an independent assessment after about 6 months and they asked all of the key players to submit their ideas.

The departure from traditional strategic planning activities conducted by a new executive leader is not common. Trachtenberg and Kouvar (2013) highlight that interim CEOs often avoid strategic planning, however, new permanent CEOs often initiate strategic [institutional] plans and are typically charged by their governing board to lead a strategic planning process, participate in the process, approve the final strategic plan version, and monitor its progress. In contrast to the standard pattern of new CEOs developing a traditional strategic plan, the executive leader responsible for special initiatives at STU further affirmed that STU broke from this pattern.

The process has been different across CEOs. Both of the last two CEOs before our current CEO have had initiatives in mind and the strategic planning process was a way to set the foundation for those initiatives.

I will share this, our [current] CEO has been here for a while now and had some ideas about what they wanted to do with tuition. You have to acknowledge the role of the board in strategic planning. When the CEO first came in, directives were somewhat dictatorial, but the CEO has managed to garner some support on the campus. People are worried about where the resources are coming from since tuition is always a big revenue source. As more people get involved in the initiatives, they are giving more support to the CEO. They have managed to overcome some of the concerns. If they had not, faculty and staff would simply go on about their work.

In stark contrast to STU, Morrill Act University (MAU) faculty and staff expect senior leadership to seek their input when developing the institutional strategic plan. Further, MAU has a formalized University Strategic Planning Council and receives formal directives from the Board of Trustee's every five years. Numerous formal committees and sub-committees meet to develop strategic plan themes and re-evaluate

the objectives annually. At MAU, the role of the executive leader is to facilitate the overall process by ensuring that the committees and sub-committees fill their charges, receive resources to execute objectives, and return with periodic reports covering the level of strategic plan objective effectiveness to the Board of Trustees that covers their degree of implementation. Further, each organizational-unit is required to have its own strategic plan that connect unit plan objectives to institutional plan objectives that are developed by the committees.

According to an MAU Dean, the strategic plan was not built around executive priorities.

At the level of the CEO and Provost, the strategic plan [institutional] was not really built around their vision, but the Provost is definitely trying to implement the strategic plan as it was drafted. I don't think the strategic plan was necessarily their vision, but they are certainly trying to make it happen and the CEO is supportive of making it happen.

This finding is further supported by a review of the MAU website, where formal directives and memorandums charging the committees to collectively form a vision and plan are publicly posted. The MAU executive leader is essentially a facilitator that enables a formal process expected by its Board of Trustees and institutional members.

Public Good University differs from STU and MAU as their CEO allows the strategic planning process to be conducted by the Provost, but the CEO does not use the strategic plan. Further, organizational-units are not required to develop their own strategic plan or use the institutional strategic plan. The PGU executive leader responsible for leading strategic initiatives shared the following.

From my view, the CEO has their own 3-4 priorities. They have things that they want the campus to focus on. These are not related to the strategic plan and

that is where campus wide efforts are focused. For example, access to lower income students could relate back to the strategic plan, however, the CEO is more focused on this and it is completely independent from the strategic plan. We don't require every unit to have a strategic plan, but most of them do.

The participant views from PGU reflect an environment where the CEO allows the institutional strategic plan process to occur as managed by the Provost, however, there is little interest in using the institutional strategic plan at the executive level. This resulted in a mix of some organizational-units authoring and maintaining an organizational-unit strategic plan with other organizational-units choosing not to develop a strategic plan. This approach to strategic planning correlates to the institutional strategic plan serving as more of an “aspirational guide” than as a plan of action.

#### *Plan as Aspirational*

The concept of a strategic plan as “aspirational” centers on the notion that all or some of the major goals and objectives published in the institutional plan are not actually intended to be accomplished as they represent exceedingly difficult and long-term goals. According to Martin (2014), strategic plans usually have lofty or aspirational goals embedded into their vision or mission statement and in their objectives and initiatives.

The notion of institutional strategic plans as aspirational is not part of the strategic planning expert advice or research literature. Earlier in this article, I reference only one scholarly author who briefly acknowledged that strategic plans could serve as an aspirational guide versus a document to be implemented. However, the concept of institutional strategic plans as “aspirational” was apparent from the participant interviews at three of the institution's studied. This concept was clearly recognized at Big State University (BSU), where all participants referenced the aspirational nature of

their institutional plan. Further, the top-level executive role, held by the CEO, published a video-message on the BSU strategic plan website where the phrase “long-term aspirations” was used to describe the purpose of the plan.

A BSU executive leader who oversaw the development of the BSU institutional plan highlighted that the strategic plan was a visionary document.

It [the BSU institutional strategic plan] is more about a vision than it is about defining specific programs. We expect that building a list of programs and roadmaps to help get us there would be a future phase. The lower in the organization a strategic plan is, the more directly it is tied to resources and metrics. The higher you go, the more visionary. There are many more ideas of what to do than there are dollars. At BSU, the way I have seen enterprise-wide strategic planning done is that it is more of a vision statement than it is showing a specific roadmap of how to get there. It is not really a roadmap that defines resource requirements.

Open Book University (OBU) also confirmed that their institutional strategic plan was an aspirational guide. The former strategic planning leader for OBU stated that “the Colleges have more traditional strategic plans than the University does. At the University level, they have more of a strategic aspirational plan.” The OBU strategic plan does not determine how organizational-unit strategic plans will be developed, nor are such plans required to be developed. The OBU institutional strategic plan website contains only a brief one-page set of aspirations that have no connection to the annual financial planning process that requires a set of “strategic goals” by each organizational-unit as they submit their annual budget requests.

In the case of Morrill Act University and Grand State University, these institutions have developed a very formalized institutional strategic planning process with clear expectations for periodic review and re-development, indicating that the

institutional strategic plan was not an aspirational guide, but a formal set of objectives with a formal and cultural expectation to align organizational-unit plans. Big State University and Open Book University viewed their institutional strategic plans as aspirational and did not require a formalized process for developing organizational-unit strategic plans or aligning work activities to the institutional strategic plan. Participants from Public Good University made no reference to their institutional strategic plan serving as an aspirational guide, however, the conditions presented indicate that the environment was conducive for the plan to be an aspirational guide, given that the CEO did not utilize the institutional strategic plan and organizational-unit plans were not required to link their objectives to it. Shining Tower University is a unique example where the institutional strategic plan had been abandoned in favor of CEO directives without an input process coupled with the publication of marketing-centric accomplishments in place of the former institutional strategic plan.

#### *Planning and Crisis Response*

The relationship between institutional strategic planning and crisis response refers to the use of the plan to address a perceived problem that affects the entire University such as a financial crisis, a lack of effectiveness as perceived by an external entity or the public, threat of losing accreditation status, etc. Hearn et al. (2006) explored a case study conducted at the University of Minnesota (UM), a land-grant institution, where declining state funding created a budget crisis and an institutional strategic plan was used to address organizational problems.

Big State University (BSU) directly referenced that the institutional strategic plan was used as a solution at some point in time. This was in response to a series of financial crises in BSU's home state that included a cultural environment where the state government had poor relationships with its universities and expected them to operate with very little state funding. The BSU executive leader responsible for government relations shared that the financial crisis spurred a renewed interest in the institutional strategic plan after a long period of apathy among executive leaders and the University community with respect to the institutional strategic plan.

The last comprehensive strategic plan was done in 2002. The previous CEO, back in 2016, embarked on a very comprehensive vision for strategic planning due to deficits and cuts. They were in a position to really look at how to consolidate departments and change organizational structures. It was quite controversial and the CEO and the provost both ended up resigning. They worked on it for over a year and tried to involve lots of faculty and deans, but it was tough since they were reimagining things.

However, in stark contrast to BSU, Open Book University (OBU) discontinued institutional strategic planning in 2012 as a response to financial crisis. During the recession years of 2008-2012, the state government where OBU resides enacted significant budget reductions. The strategic plan process was suspended during this time, as strategic initiatives were deemed to be inappropriate during the years where addressing fiscal problems were paramount. After the recession years ended, institutional strategic planning re-emerged and was changed into a budget planning process without the use of a traditional institutional strategic planning processes.

Only one participant referenced the institutional strategic plan and its relationship to crisis, and further, only one website among the institutions studied offered a glimpse

into the impact of a financial crisis on institutional strategic planning. Nevertheless, additional research is recommended on this topic. This recommendation is based on the evidence that this has occurred within at least three land-grant institutions based on the case study at the University of Minnesota and the OSU and BSU findings. The research questions in this study were not designed to explore the topic in detail. A future study with research questions designed to surface this phenomenon could yield additional insights relevant to the higher education community.

### *Planning Process*

The institutional strategic planning process includes creating the initial, institution-wide strategic plan to comprehensively cover the entire university. There is variation in how institutional strategic plans are used, and there is variation in how the plans are created.

In all six institutions studied, the institutional strategic plan and organizational-unit planning process were all discussed in some form. Morrill Act University (MAU) displayed the most comprehensive and formal strategic planning process among all institutions studied. A formal University-wide strategic planning management office exists with an executive leader managing the office and reporting to the CEO. Numerous committees, sub-committees, task forces, surveys, and other collection tools are used to gather input from as many stakeholders as possible. According to the executive leader responsible for strategic planning at MAU, it is estimated that over 600 people actually participated in the institutional strategic plan process.

Grand State University (GSU), like MAU, has a formal institutional strategic plan process that is sponsored by the CEO with published institutional strategic plan development procedures and organizational-unit planning procedures. The GSU website contains a comprehensive listing of organizational-unit plans with each College and non-academic organizational-unit plan publicly available. Each plan is listed with the last date it was revised and includes an overview of how each organizational-unit plan was developed.

The process at GSU does not include a formal requirement to report to the governing board and the CEO gives direction to the institutional strategic planning process based on public messages and charges to committees published on the GSU website. A GSU Dean noted that GSU expended great effort to include numerous stakeholders in the planning process. “At GSU, we created the institutional strategic plan by consulting with as many constituents as possible to include faculty, staff, students, board members, advisory boards, and community members. We then consulted with University leadership.”

Big State University (BSU) utilizes a process that includes a diverse body of stakeholders in the institutional planning process, however, there is less formality in the planning development process and organizational-unit plans are not required. BSU embraces an aspirational strategic planning format with a process that includes a variety of open-ended forums where participation is optional and there is no requirement to have specific representatives from certain colleges or non-academic organizational units.

According to a BSU executive leader responsible for government relations, the process transitioned under the current CEO following the previous difficulty with institutional strategic planning during a period where the plan was used as a solution.

I have been at BSU since 2005. Under the current CEO, they wanted a much leaner strategic planning process and very much felt like they needed to embark on some strategic planning process to help the campus coalesce since it was a pretty rough period of time in the previous years. They felt like part of their leadership and vision was to have the campus come around through a lean process. They did not want it [the institutional strategic plan] to be a reflection of everything that could possibly be done at BSU.

Open Book University (OBU) referenced their planning process in the context of research questions related to the connection between financial resources and the institutional strategic plan. This is due to a shift in the institutional strategic planning process that resulted after a period of budget cuts. The OBU planning process is essentially an annual budget proposal process that includes a listing of strategic goals that are used to justify budget requests. The former OBU leader responsible for strategic planning noted that “we go through our annual strategic planning process where the Provost talks about what new programs or initiatives are needed and if someone wants to start a new program or initiative [that requires funding], then there is a more explicit review.”

The Public Good University (PGU) institutional strategic plan is overseen by the Provost with the CEO (top level executive) following their own objectives in a separate plan. Organizational units are not required to publish a plan and there is no expectation for following the institutional strategic plan. PGU has not updated their institutional strategic plan since 2013 and is at the end of their 2014-2019 published strategic plan

period. The optional requirement for organizational-unit strategic plan development resulted in a mix of some organizational-units publishing a plan with other units choosing not to develop a plan. A centralized office exists that offers strategic plan development as a consulting service with a financial rate. Organizational-units are able to contract with this office for a fee and a consultant will facilitate and develop the plan for the organizational-unit.

Shining Tower University (STU) is unique among the participant institutions as there is no longer a formal institutional strategic planning process. According to STU executive leader responsible for strategic initiatives, the process was different between CEOs and now includes a smaller group of executive leaders who develop the plan that is then used internally by the CEO and Provost.

The process has been different across CEOs. Both of the last two CEOs have had initiatives in mind and the strategic planning process was a way to set the foundation for those initiatives. Our current CEO today used a very different kind of process and included the Board. Their process is much more inclusive of people [executive leaders]. What happens, in practice, is once the Board approves the strategic plan, the Provost is essentially onboard with the plan and the Provost provide budget priorities for the Deans. The CEO will allocate their funding to certain priorities and so will the Provost.

The planning process is different among each of the institutions studied, however, common characteristics exist. Examples of commonality include the use of committees, public forums, involvement of executive leaders, and some form of website publication, even if it is to convey a marketing-centric list of accomplishments. Each institution displayed these commonalities with the exception of STU.

### *Executive Vision & Purpose of the Plan*

The executive vision and purpose of the institutional strategic plan refers to the guiding vision expressed by a governing board, the chief executive officer for the institution, the chief academic officer for the institution, or a committee(s) outlining the future-state of the university and the purpose of the strategic plan. This category also includes the issuance of guidelines to organizational units for developing their strategic plan(s).

Participants across all institutions provided a statement that referenced the executive vision or purpose of the strategic plan either at the institutional or organizational-unit level, most commonly in response to the first research question that sought to understand the purpose of strategic planning from their perspective. The Grand State University (GSU) executive leader for government relations offered the following.

GSU just finished year one of implementing a strategic plan that was developed over the course of 18 months with the University and the Board of Trustees (BOT). The strategic plan is a guiding effort, not just a document, whose purpose is to really say here are the things that we need to focus on to achieve common goals. The BOT wants us to be the leading, public flagship university in the nation and have given the University 5 areas that we need to focus on.

A Grand State University (GSU) Dean offered a detailed explanation of the plans purpose and a distinction between institution and unit level purpose.

At the institution level, the primary purpose is to give the university a sense of priorities and focus for both internal audiences and external audiences. If you look at the university, you can say specifically where the focus is. This process [Strategic Planning] is how the CEO messages everything that they do and it really is the roadmap for how we make major decisions at the institution and executive level.

At the college and unit level, they do strategic plans to demonstrate their distinct competitive advantage in the marketplace. We really want to distinguish ourselves at the college level. For example, if we do a strategic plan in engineering and one of our focus areas emerges in medical engineering with cancer research, etc., if that is a focus area, then that is where we invest. So, we become very intentional to grow our faculty and research capability in that area and this gives us a distinct competitive advantage.

The Open Book University (OBU) former executive leader for strategic planning offered that “the purpose of the institutional strategic plan is to provide a framework for many decentralized and autonomous units to work from, that it is less about a top-down hierarchy and more about setting a vision.” Public Good University participants believed that the purpose of the strategic plan was to ensure that they were harnessing their collective efforts toward common goals.

Morrill Act University participants believed that the purpose of a university strategic plan was to help units plan their work while Big State University (BSU) participants saw the plan as an aspirational guide that helped with difficult resource decisions. Shining Tower University (STU) participants also saw the institutional strategic plan as a tool for guiding difficult resource decisions.

In summary, participants provided statements that directly addressed the purpose of the strategic plan and interlaced the role of executive leaders or governing bodies. Essentially, all of the participants saw the strategic plan as a way to set priorities and guide resource decisions, even though they all used different words to describe this view. In Chapter five, I offer a detailed conclusion of both research questions covering these responses.

### *External Plan Integration*

External plan integration refers to the incorporation of institutional strategic plan alignment to higher-level plans, such as University System strategic plans, Governing Board strategic plans, State Government strategic plans, Federal Government strategic plans, or any strategic plans outside of the University where an expectation for alignment exists.

Among the institutions studied, Morrill Act University (MAU) maintains a requirement to align their institution plan to the Board of Trustees (BOT) on a periodic cycle. The MAU executive leader responsible for strategic planning briefly described the process.

The BOT asked for strategic plan alignment from the CEO. The BOT sends the strategic plan to a variety of legislators and give updates to them with the goal of showing them what they are doing in the form of activities, projects, and different initiatives that align to state objectives.

At Shining Tower University (STU), there is a clear expectation from the governing board for alignment of the strategic plan and also for capital campaign strategies. The STU executive leader responsible for development shared the following.

External plan alignment is pretty strong here at STU. Here, it is clear to everyone what the strategic goals are and it is clear by the actions of the leadership that people are moving toward those goals. Every year I have to present to the trustees where we are at in our campaign and I have to attribute the success somewhere and I think that it is because of our CEOs relationship to the Board.

Our current CEO today used a very different kind of process and included the Board. Their process is much more inclusive of executive leaders. One initiative was around the cost of tuition and we have had tuition be flat for several years. Depending on how you look at it, this is clearly connected to the budget. This is a direct connection to what money comes in and that has been linked at other ways to get revenue for the university. Another initiative was

online learning and you could link this to the acquisition of an online learning infrastructure.

While two institutions referenced a need to align the institutional plan to an external plan or governing body, it is important to note that only MAU has a formal requirement to align the institutional plan to an external plan that is maintained by the Board of Trustees.

In the case of both Open Book University (OBU) and Public Good University, these institutions are located in States where there is a culture of decentralized autonomy between the State government and higher education institutions receiving public funding, resulting in low expectation for alignment or reporting to their respective governing board or state government. The relationship between the budget cuts experienced by OBU, the cultural autonomy of higher education within a specific state, and the transformation of the strategic planning process into a budget planning process following budget cuts warrant additional research in a subsequent study to fully understand cause and effect relationships that are occurring in these institutions and possibly other land-grant institutions.

### **Theme 3 – Strategic Plan Implementation & Assessment**

Based on their shared strategic planning experiences at the University of Northern Colorado, Rowley, Lujan, and Dolence (1997) argue that strategic plan implementation using a project-centric view is a critical component of the overall strategic planning lifecycle. In their book, *Strategic Change in Colleges and Universities*, Rowley et al. argue that one of the most important outcomes from strategic planning is the facilitation of a decision-making process that stimulates organizational

change based on the strategic plan. Throughout this theme, I share the findings from the categories that associate most closely to the implementation process.

Strategic plan implementation as a theme categorically includes the organizational-unit plan alignment process, cultural paradigms associated with implementation, the use of the plan as a marketing tool, executive advocacy during implementation, the role of relationships among executive leaders during implementation, organizational-unit planning, formalized alignment techniques, strategic investment programs, and long-term operational change. This theme focuses not on why the institution should move in a certain direction, rather, it focuses on how to move toward the goals documented in the strategic plan.

#### *Organizational-Unit Plan Alignment*

Organizational-unit plan alignment refers to the tools, techniques, and processes by which organizational units align with elements of the institutional strategic plan. Alignment in the context of this research means that an objective or measure in an organizational-unit plan could be similarly found in the institutional plan. For example, an institutional plan could contain an objective for student success among science disciplines. If an organizational-unit plan for a college or non-academic unit contained an objective for student success among science disciplines with similar language and an application of tactics and measures, this would be a simplified example of alignment.

References to the concept of organizational-unit plan alignment to the institutional plan were found across each of the institutions in the study. Each participant from Grand State University (GSU), where all organizational units are

required to periodically develop and revise their organizational-unit plan, provided statements in this category. A GSU Dean and CEO of a GSU campus, offered the following.

Once you have the strategic plan [institutional], the next step is to create a strategic implementation plan. That plan then helps you with your budgeting priorities every year. You then know what the priorities are, the activities and initiatives, and then the implementation plan assigns those initiatives to specific faculty members and leaders. In the case of a regional campus, because we are smaller, it is a little easier to say here is the implementation plan and here are the people that will be responsible for getting the work done and are assigned specific tasks.

The Morrill Act University an executive leader responsible for managing the institutional strategic planning office, described the process and expectation for alignment in detail.

At MAU we have done and will continue to do a bottom down and top up approach where the unit plans were developed before the institution plan. The real purpose of the University plan was to help units plan their work. At the institution level, we try to ensure alignment between the units to the institution plan, but it is hard to get the apples-to-apples alignment that is necessary. The messaging to the units is that they want to be aligned, but also that we need to achieve their strategic objectives.

They [organizational units] are working right now to increase alignment between institution and unit plans. The first thing that they are doing is trying to make the timeline be integrated instead of the unit plans going first and the institution plan coming after. So, they are going to extend the unit planning time to the year 2020 so, they can get the institution plan and the unit plan on the same timeline. What they are doing is calling this their gap year to allow the university and the units to go through some detailed assessment.

Sometimes when Deans ask for funds, there might be a request for showing their strategic plan. The Provost will sometimes ask for how a position fits into their strategic priorities in order to justify filling the position.

The organizational-unit alignment process was not as consistent at Public Good University (PGU) as described by the executive leader responsible for strategic planning.

At PGU, the Vice CEO for Finance is working to ensure that budgets follow goals. They actually fund goals in the units and sometimes this means going after new money to fund strategic initiatives. At the unit level, it depends on the leadership. It is a mixed bag across the units as to how much they use the strategic plan to support their initiatives, e.g. – rather than student financial aid submitting their budgeting and just adding extra budget.

A third example is alignment of administrative units. I have seen a lot of effort inside the Finance and Admin side to align their work overall. They have their own strategic plan and that aligns to the institution-wide strategic plan and they use it to align their operational work activities. However, not everything rolls up to the strategic plan, so it is not possible for all of their work to roll up, but a lot of it will. The academic units are more independent, but on the administrative side, they tend to roll their work up and align the initiatives.

Open Book University (OBU) does not require separate organizational-unit strategic plans, however, the annual budget planning process requires the submission of strategic goals from organizational units to justify budget requests. The former executive leader for strategic planning at OBU described the process.

At the College level, the Colleges identify how faculty might meet a certain research niche that they are trying to expand and how new faculty might meet goals for retention. The colleges are very good about framing what they are asking for. This becomes the alignment piece for what is being asked for in the budget.

A large part of each colleges budget is at their discretion. It is really the incremental dollars that the Provost adds that gives an opportunity for them [the Colleges] to have incentive for alignment in order to gain additional resources.

There are always more good ideas than resources. Initiatives that are not funded don't necessarily not align, since there are so many, but it does help move the needle toward meeting the direction set by the Provost or major needs of the University.

Shining Tower University does not require organizational-unit plans; however, it is expected that organizational units will support the priorities of the CEO. Big State University (BSU), which utilizes an aspirational strategic plan model with organizational

units optionally publishing a strategic plan, often include vision statements in their publications that reference a theme in the institutional strategic plan.

Each of the institutions referenced alignment, or connection, between organizational-unit plans and the institutional plan. The formal strategic planning process at MAU and GSU resulted in very specific participant responses on how alignment worked. At PGU, where organizational unit plans were optional, the alignment process was less clear as compared to MAU and GSU. OBU's integrated strategic planning and budget planning model resulted in a response that connected financial resources to strategic goals. STU's executive-driven strategic planning model was reflected in the participant response with ways to align with the CEO. BSU's aspirational model with optional organizational-unit plans tendered the most uncertain response to how alignment occurred.

#### *Culture of Shared Governance*

A culture of shared governance as a category within this body of research covers the depth of involvement desired by prospective planning participants specifically associated with implementation on the campus. This includes the concept of decentralized organizational structures posing a perceived challenge to developing a unified vision.

The shared governance category was first created following the interview with the BSU executive leader responsible for government relations:

Just getting a strategic plan written and done is a success in itself at BSU. Just the fact that something is in place is extremely successful for our culture. This CEO is very focused on moving the campus forward and you could

measure success based on the targets in the strategic plan [as opposed to prior plans]. Already, it [the institutional strategic plan] has been a success through helping to address the differences with decentralized units, but whether or not it can be achievable remains to be seen. This was a very heavy lift and before the most recent plan, they did not have the internal politics of the campus worked out and they were not used to a highly decentralized environment. The campus was not ready [reference to prior institutional strategic plan development and implementation attempts].

While I had anticipated that all other institutions would reference some form of expectation for shared governance associated with strategic plan development and implementation since this interview was the third interview conducted, this was not the case. Three of six institutions referenced cultural expectations for shared governance as opposed to all six. However, all BSU Participants offered statements that reflected shared governance paradigms associated with strategic plan development and implementation. A former BSU Dean offered the following insight.

At BSU, we are not a command and control type institution and we are influenced beyond formal authority. BSU is a weak Dean institution with strong faculty governance. So, the idea that the strategic plan supports what the Dean wants, would not be true. A Dean would need strong faculty support to get any initiatives done.

Morrill Act University (MAU) references to shared governance expectations were associated with the expectation for “top-down and bottom-up” planning in the context of engaging employees at all levels of the organization with direction from executive leaders and strategic planning committees. The executive leader for planning at MAU summarized the process.

Here at MAU we have done and will continue to do a top-down and bottom-up approach where the unit plans were developed before the institution plan. The real purpose of the University plan was to help units plan their work. At the institution level, we try to ensure alignment between the units to the institution plan. The messaging to the units is that they want to be aligned, but also that we

need to achieve their strategic objectives.

An Open Book University Dean referenced their cultural experience when developing an organizational-unit plan for a College. “Developing and implementing the plan gave a lot of people an opportunity to express some amount of dissatisfaction as to what we are putting forward, which has helped us to clarify priorities.”

While I suspect that shared governance expectations influence the strategic planning and implementation process at both the institutional and organizational-unit level among most, if not all institutions, the research questions did not highlight this finding extensively. The BSU cultural paradigm is prevalent enough that the role of culture at the institution surfaced despite the research question design.

#### *Plan as Marketing Tool*

The use of the strategic plan as a marketing tool category reflects the knowledge among participants that one or more strategic plan component will be used to influence individuals outside of the University through marketing and communication efforts.

Satterwhite & Cedja (2005) connected the growing interest and investment of higher education institutions to enhance their fundraising capabilities by focusing on the role of the University CEO in fundraising and the strategic plan as a marketing tool. At Public Good University (PGU), the executive leader responsible for strategic planning directly affirmed the use of the strategic plan as a marketing tool by stating that “we have a public strategic plan document that is written in a marketing brochure form and a separate one for internal use.”

A Big State University (BSU) former Dean shared that “the strategic plan can generate 3, 4, or 5 very sharp vision statements that can be galvanized for marketing and fundraising.” The BSU leader responsible for strategic planning also recognized the importance of differentiation as compared to other higher education institutions through the use of the institutional strategic plan as a marketing tool.

I think a lot about branding in higher education and whether or not you can describe what an organization stands for, who their products are designed for, etc. For example, if I say Ford, you know who their products are for, but I can't tell you that for a lot of middle tier public universities, they all kind of blend and look the same. I can't tell how Oklahoma University is different from Missouri, or Missouri is different versus Iowa in terms of what they stand for. The ones that will succeed from a marketing perspective are those who can articulate what is unique about them.

The Open Book University (OBU) executive leader responsible for advancement connected the institutional strategic planning process to marketing along with references to fundraising through the following statement.

The medical center drives huge dollars from donors and we don't have that here. The provost wanted to secure an additional 100 faculty and so we launched our capital campaign and that was a central theme in the capital campaign. The Provost cared passionately about this, so we made a central theme in the strategic plan and we built that into the capital campaign. Two years in, we were trending the wrong way. So, we re-evaluated and decided that we needed to re-commit marketing and communications resources and so we finished the campaign ahead by having 112 endowed chairs. We were able to close strong because of a strong marketing message that resonated with our donors and our alumni. The capital campaign planning process does drive strategic planning in the units. Their planning also drives our capital planning.

An MAU Dean very simply stated, “if you look at the MAU website, the strategic plan is shown in a marketing format and they are working on the implementation plan and related documents for the website.”

In four of six institutions, both the institutional and organizational-unit plans were recognized as having a benefit to their marketing strategy. This was directly connected to fundraising activity and the publication of the institutional or organizational-unit strategic plan on public websites with custom brochures.

### *Executive Advocacy*

Executive advocacy refers to the practice where executive leaders such as the CEO, Provost, or their subordinates are charged with implementing or advocating for support of one or more components of the institutional strategic plan. All six institutions used strategic plans to align work activities to the goals of a CEO, Provost, Dean, or other executive leader. This topic will be covered in detail in Chapter five.

Grand State University (GSU) utilizes a formal strategic planning and alignment process as described in earlier discussion. A GSU leader responsible for government relations discussed the assignment of strategic plan outcomes.

Each of the [strategic plan] pillars have an executive cabinet level owner. Each member is responsible for implementing a piece of the plan. For example, in the [reference removed to ensure anonymity] pillar, tracking annual fundraising receipts is a performance metric and that is used to ensure that they are on track. The CEO has five or six key performance objectives that are public that they agree on with the Board. One of those is to implement the strategic plan. The CEO then uses those objectives and each of them has more granular objectives for how they are going to be used for implementing the strategic plan.

At Morrill Act University (MAU), the CEO is responsible for ensuring that the institutional strategic plan process is facilitated overall and must report progress to the governing board periodically. While the CEO is responsible for the overall process, similarly to GSU, the Provost is responsible for executing the institutional strategic plan.

Public Good University (PGU) has a less formal process for strategic planning as compared to GSU and MAU. The CEO does not require that all organizational units publish a strategic plan. Further, the CEO maintains a small number of objectives that are important to them.

The Open Book University (OBU) CEO and Provost set the overall objectives at the institution level and leverage the budget planning process to promote those objectives. The OBU executive leader for advancement highlighted the challenges with executive advocacy for implementing strategic goals and shared an example of the connection to funding.

About twelve years ago, our Provost went into a meeting with the College of [name removed to ensure anonymity]. They were in this meeting and were trying to restructure the program and the faculty were pushing back. They finally snapped after they kept wanting time to make the changes. The Provost responded that twenty years ago we had this same problem and nothing has changed. The same faculty that were involved then were involved now and it makes it difficult for change, especially when faculty have tenure. We as a university don't know how to make these cuts.

So, we look to fundraising to help bridge the gap [to implement CEO and Provost objectives]. That is the challenge of the budgeting process is that a CEO or leadership team will know where they want to go, so they will try to scrape money where they can to find seed money, but are never able to wholesale move large buckets of money to make the big impacts more quickly. As a result, they turn to fundraising. Our CEO found a way to get several million dollars carved out over several years so we could build up and show competency in this area to show that this would be a good place for them to invest this money. We actually bet on the horse and got this awarded and it was a major plus for the university and has propelled us years ahead. However, the CEO had to scrape out money from all sorts of places because the CEO cannot easily move the money around to accomplish strategic goals.

At Big State University (BSU), the aspirational nature of the plan does not directly

correlate downward to organizational-unit plans and the CEO does not advocate for implementation. The Shining Tower University (STU) CEO sets the strategic objectives in primary partnership with the governing board and will then ask for input from executive leaders or University committees and bodies, such as the faculty senate, during the implementation process. However, this process is met with some level of resistance in the implementation process. The STU executive leader responsible for special initiatives described their view of the process at STU.

There has been lots of direct ties to following the CEO's initiatives, which was from the Board. The Provost has very carefully managed this initiative, had a group of people giving input, committees, faculty, and administrators to show us what a [reference removed to ensure anonymity] can include. The money flowed from the CEO to the Provost and then the Provost managed the initiative.

Getting academics, versus staff, is much more complicated to get them aligned. If the CEO doesn't do it, then it will backfire. The CEO has a closer relationship with the faculty senate and has recognized the role of the senate from their perspective, both positive and negative, that you need to be as transparent as possible in moving goals forward. You are going to be better off with a thick skin. This is the nature of the university and there is going to be some disagreement. The point is that aligning faculty is a long process. You can't just say to the faculty, go and do this. A good CEO will be ready for a few twists and turns in that process. Some are more inflexible than others.

In summary, executive advocacy for the implementation of institutional strategic plan goals by a top-level executive such as a CEO, CEO, or Provost, was present at each of the case study institutions.

### *Relationships*

The category of relationships refers to the idea that strategic plan implementation requires significant skill in developing, maintaining, and using relationships with stakeholders within the institution to execute the plan. This could occur between a CEO and the faculty senate, a Provost and a Dean, and so on.

It was expected prior to the research that this topic would be raised extensively as part of the implementation process based on the literature review where multiple authors discuss the need for skill among executive leaders to advocate for strategic plans to be successfully implemented. Rowley and Sherman (2001) believed that people have a basic need to either benefit from the plan or be an originator of some portion of its outcome(s). Involvement of stakeholders in both the planning and implementation phase of strategic planning implies a certain skill needed by an executive leader in managing relationships across a diverse set of interests. With traditional strategic planning requiring interaction among numerous committees, public events, and dialogue between executive leaders and faculty, it seemed logical that this claim was valid. However, only one participant at one institution directly referenced the need for this skill during the implementation process.

A Grand State University (GSU) Dean stated that “Vice-CEOs and Vice-Provosts need skill to get their themes done. They need to be able to communicate with Deans and department heads or they won’t be effective.” This comment is a reference to the GSU process whereby all individuals who report to the CEO and who report to the Provost are assigned institutional strategic plan objectives with the intended purpose of

implementing their objective in partnership with either an academic or non-academic organizational unit. In the case of GSU, each executive leader is required to give presentations, lead meetings, and communicate with academic and non-academic leaders as part of implementing their assigned goal.

With only one participant reference at one institution, the comment was nearly discarded as part of the research findings. However, it is presented here to highlight the uniqueness of the GSU process for strategic plan implementation that was not found in any of the other institutions studied. If other institutions utilized this process, it is suspected that responses reflecting relationship management as part of strategic plan implementation would likely increase.

#### *Organizational-Unit Planning*

Organizational-unit planning refers to the process by which organizational units develop strategic plans and engage stakeholders. This process can occur in either an academic College or a non-academic organizational-unit, such as human resources, marketing, finance, information technology, and so on. Organizational-unit planning was placed in the strategic plan implementation theme as opposed to the strategic plan development theme due to the relationship between organizational-unit plans and institutional plans where the organizational-unit plan is expected to be a form of implementation as a result of the institutional plan.

Four of six institutions responded with statements referencing the organizational-unit planning. A GSU Dean shared that “there are four to eight [institutional strategic plan] initiatives that impact my College, but only one where we are directly responsible.

I direct my team to conduct strategic planning retreats every year to develop and revise our plan.”

A Public Good University (PGU) Dean described the organizational-unit planning process and connection to the budget.

The important component is that we created initiatives lead by individuals who are accountable for their respective initiative. A good example is “inclusivity and climate” for our students, faculty, and staff. Now, I annually require updates from the individuals assigned to the initiatives and we update the College plan annually. What this enabled us to do is grow our budget by 60% in the last five years, our gift giving by almost 400% and so on. Because I hold them accountable at least annually, this made it more effective for me to guide the College.

In each of the four institutions, there is a periodic development and review process of the organizational-unit plan that is led by either a Dean or a non-academic executive leader. It is expected that some form of this is occurring at MAU, as all Colleges and non-academic organizational units are required to publish a plan. However, the research did not surface this information from the interviews.

#### *Strategic Investment Program*

The strategic investment program category reflects the use of a formalized strategic investment program where an executive leader and/or a committee utilizes a process for requesting funding allotments or grants to fund projects intended to implement a component of the strategic plan.

Only one institution referenced the use of a formalized strategic investment program to encourage adoption of the institutional strategic plan and this was reflected by comments from two different participants at the same institution. The investment program occurred at Morrill Act University (MAU), where a formal strategic plan

program is in place with an expectation to report progress to the governing board. The MAU executive leader responsible for strategic planning stated the following.

At the University level, they have eight pillars and there are sub-groups that manage those pillars. The university community has the opportunity to apply for funds through “seed grants” that will align to those priorities. They will grant up to \$250,000 for each grant to fund strategic initiatives every three months, so it is several millions of dollars per year.

The purpose of the program is to engage the University community and move away from the strategic plan being a spreadsheet with a few goals and metrics and that is it. Instead, they want a living, breathing strategic plan where everyone can fully engage in the plan. Students, faculty, and staff can apply for these grants. The committee reviews the proposals and the Provost makes the final decision. They are currently looking at moving the grants even higher to several hundreds of thousands of dollars and having less grants so that they can scale up the priorities to the next level.

If the institution is making an investment into strategic planning, then it actually comes alive instead of just making goals and not having funding. The groups that go through the seed grant process, they have to give an update of their progress every six months and the units have to give an update every year. This is one way that they try to show how they are moving the plan forward.

In no other institutions did a formalized strategic investment program exist, however, it could be argued that the Open Book University process that requires strategic goals to be listed in the budget request process is a strategic investment program that is limited to a small number of executive leaders. Given that MAU has the most formal strategic planning process of the institutions studied with a requirement to report progress to the governing board, additional research could examine the necessity of such a program when utilizing a highly formalized strategic planning process. The research could also discover whether the strategic investment program itself is effective at accomplishing its intended purpose.

### *Institutional and Organizational-Unit Plan Performance Indicators*

At least one participant from each institution responded with statements that highlighted the lack of or inconsistent use of assessment metrics with institutional or organizational-unit strategic plans, yet some universities are making an effort to measure outcomes.

Morrill Act University (MAU) executive leader for strategic planning shared that their institution “did not have a set of strategic plan metrics and that is based on our culture.” This was also affirmed by an MAU Dean who shared how assessment occurs at the organizational-unit level, but not at the institution level. In review of the MAU website, the institution releases annual “progress reports” that summarize efforts in a celebration of success based on the previous year within each of the institutional strategic plan themes without specific metrics. An MAU Dean described the reason for this in detail.

We purposefully do not have [institutional] metrics. The idea is that if they put out a set of metrics, then that is all they will do. Instead, if they don't, then they will see how they fit into the plan and hopefully foster a certain amount of creativity for people to really impact the institution, be creative, and make a difference instead of focusing on a particular metric.

At the unit-level, we are about to use an assessment management tool called [name removed to ensure anonymity] that has a strategic planning module. There will be five units that will pilot this summer and see how well the software meets their needs before we move this to the entire institution.

Grand State University (GSU) reflected a similar approach where metrics in the institutional strategic plan are not assessed and organizational-unit plans are assessed. According to the GSU executive leader for outreach, this occurs through periodic review

of performance among Deans, who are each responsible for strategic plan implementation in their College.

One of the ways that this happens is that our Deans are up for review every four years and chairs every five years. So, when they come up for review, there is a process that we go through. They write a document that discussed their accomplishments over their previous term. Where we are moving that assessment, process is to reflect on their strategic plan and the work that they have done, in terms of how it advanced their strategic plan and how it advanced their aspirational goals.

Another GSU Participant shared that the CEO was deeply interested in strategic plan assessment. Recall that GSU assigns an institutional strategic plan objective to each of the executive leaders that directly report to the CEO or Provost. These leaders then interact with individual Colleges and non-academic organizational-unit members to promote fulfillment of the objective.

The Public Good University (PGU) executive leader for strategic planning shared that there were metrics in the institutional strategic plan that were tracked with data collection occurring in partnership with organizational-units.

Research dollars spent is a measure, research ranking is a measure. They are closely tracking access and how many students are from a particular background. It all depends on the specific goal. We have been strategic with various success measures overall. We are always using the data and are constantly trying to make interpretations from it. We have to work with different groups across campus to gather data on progress and are putting a team together to analyze the data.

The Open Book University (OBU) former leader of strategic planning shared their view on strategic plan assessment at their institution and also provided their perspective on the approach to institutional strategic plan assessment in higher education.

In terms of metrics related to the plan, there are things that they measure all the

time and can show progress toward different goals and priorities. The more interesting question is, was the overall plan successful? You can measure individual pieces, but the better question is whether the overall plan was successful.

Higher education doesn't really do this [strategic plan assessment]. Plans are launched with great fan-fare, but at the end of five years, no one stands up and says that the plan was successful or done and now onto the next one. I think that they just kind of fizzle out. Plans as a whole don't have as clear cut of metrics. A plan is just the summary of individual metrics. That may be fine, and there are lots of things that you can measure. We don't go through and really take stock of determining if a plan is successful.

Shining Tower University (STU) utilizes a CEO-driven strategic planning process where the CEO sets the strategic plan goals in partnership with the governing board. The STU executive leader for special initiatives recognized that success can be defined in many different ways, offering a set of comments that were only found at STU.

Some of it depends on how concrete your strategic planning initiatives are. We know that we can redefine/define success in a lot of different ways. There is almost always a way to define something as successful. There are quantitative measures, such as with student debt. You can measure success on tuition costs by determining if enrollment has increased and then it is further defined by how much money we have saved students and so on.

The [program name removed to ensure anonymity] initiative has lots of ways to define success. People do not focus on failures or challenges very much, which is unfortunate, but I think that all strategic plans are deemed a roaring success since there are so many ways that we can determine that it was successful. Again, most of the initiatives in a strategic plan are very broad, so it allows us to redefine success. If you want to do true assessment of instruction, you don't do that through a strategic plan.

Big State University (BSU) utilizes an aspirational institutional strategic plan. According to the BSU executive leader responsible for strategic planning, the institutional strategic plan is not measured, however, some organizational-unit plans do contain measures.

The strategic plan here is more of a visioning document that will result in plans at the Divisional level. We will have administrative goals, philanthropically goals, etc. Those will have metrics assigned where we can evaluate them. The strategic plan itself addresses problems that are almost unsolvable, but it is designed to position BSU to be able to address these challenges going forward. We have to ask ourselves, are we making progress against societal goals?

In three of the six institutions studied, references were made to the use of “Score Cards” and “SMART Goals.” The concept of Score Cards and SMART goals relate to specific sets of metrics used by an organizational unit with the express intent of review by an executive leader such as a Dean, Provost, or CEO.

The PGU executive leader for government affairs provided a description of how they use SMART goals within organizational-unit assessment.

If you think about this for a second, we build SMART goals for our staff in part around the strategic plan. A SMART goal document includes a specific and measurable item. For example, one of our priorities for the institution is infrastructure and capital improvements. My team is responsible for getting the state to invest in those cycles. So, I have to report whether or not we were successful with the state. Did we execute our plan? Did we get legislators to campus for a tour? Did we have a media campaign to support it? Did you get the building or not? So, let’s say you didn’t meet your goal, there are many factors outside of our influence where we can’t totally own all of the responsibility for it. It could be that some bad press came out that hurt the initiative. The question is, did we meet those benchmarks throughout the process? It needs to be within our control. Did we hit those benchmarks along the way?

At Grand State University (GSU), the use of “score cards” were referenced by a Dean. In review of the GSU website, the institution maintains a dashboard that contains sets of scorecards where each scorecard is a measurement of progress toward strategic goals. The scorecards reflect measures associated with national rankings, research expenditures, advancement goals, and the like. Each score card contains a list of initiatives and corresponding measures as tracked over a number of years. Each

initiative contains a red, yellow, or green status indicator, where green is meeting or exceeding the goal, yellow represents caution, and red reflects a status that does not meet the goal and requires action. Each color status has an up arrow indicating improvement from the last period, a dash symbol representing that no change has occurred, and a down arrow representing a decrease in performance as measured against the last period.

A GSU Dean provided the following commentary on GSU score cards.

I have seen two big strategic plans for the university and I have been involved directly with both. In each case, we went about developing “score cards” using metrics that were well defined. In the current plan, one example was retention and graduation rates, so this is very clear and now there are people at the university level working on developing score cards that we see every year. While this happened before, the scorecards got started and they were never finished and they fell apart. We had score cards that were still in draft stage for two years that were not complete. This time around, we have the human leaders working to make sure that assessment keeps going as opposed to a software application or method for submitting score cards.

In the case of PGU and BSU, the use of SMART goals appears to reflect the individual preference of these leaders for assessment at the organizational-unit level. The consistent observation is that institutional strategic plan assessment is not common. MAU, with a very formal strategic planning and implementation process, does not promote the use of institutional plan assessment. Further, it is counter to their institutional culture to do so. Rather, the focus on assessment is placed at the organizational-unit level. It is interesting to note that there does appear to be interest in moving toward better organizational-unit plan assessment through the use of a new strategic plan assessment software that is currently being piloted by five MAU Colleges.

Institutional strategic plan assessment does not occur or when it does, is inconsistent, however, both MAU and GSU are slowly moving toward consistent and

formalized institutional plan assessment. Where organizational-unit plans are present, assessment metrics are present and especially so for college plans with unique usage of SMART goals in some cases.

In no institution reviewed was an assessment framework, such as the one employed at Widener University as studied by Sullivan and Richardson (2011), used for institutional plan assessment. Further, when Deans and executive leaders offered how their plans were assessed, no responses indicated the use of an assessment framework.

### *Challenges to Assessment and the Failings of Strategic Planning*

At least one individual from each institution offered their view on why strategic plan assessment was difficult. Some responses veered into coverage of why strategic plans are viewed as “failing.”

Two participants from Public Good University (PGU) believed that leadership turnover was the primary reason why strategic plans failed. A PGU Dean shared the following.

It is critical to identify, hire, and support leaders of your departments (department chairs, associate deans, etc.). Success is impossible if there are not super talented people in those roles. It does not matter how good your strategic plan is, if you don't have the right leaders, you are going to fail. All of my associate deans and most of my chairs have been replaced. There is a group of about ten people that are leading various areas that are exceptional. You must have leaders to implement the strategies or strategic plan.

A Grand State University (GSU) Dean offered a detailed perspective.

We will see, five years from now, if we can look back and say whether or not we are successful. The Deans, really, in the end, have to help and commit to getting the initiatives done.

The key is that the metrics have to be developed very quickly to be available right at the start [of a newly released Strategic Plan]. If there is a lot of

uncertainty then it will probably be bad. The time between the release of the strategic plan and the assessment have to come out very quickly.

I have lived through a lot of strategic planning processes. I believe in them and as a Dean I have found them to be very helpful when people come asking for support, I can say how does this support our strategic plan. Thinking about how many plans I have lived through, I think that it really is the people and the implementation plan used in the planning process that has to be very tight. That has been a revelation to me as we have discussed this topic.

The Shining Tower University (STU) executive leader for development believed that strategic plans lacked innovation and needed to focus on utilizing competent leaders who could generate new revenue streams associated with the plan.

This is more of an opinion as opposed to an example. I think that culturally, societally, in the United States, it seems that we as a society have lost our ability to think of really, really big ideas. I say to faculty, what if you got a gift of \$X dollars, and then they all say in some form that they want a new facility. We have lost a little bit of our ability to think about things in really great ways, like Elon Musk, who accomplished great things and I wish that at STU and in higher education that we have people being innovative all the time. Our CEO sends me emails about other institutions receiving big gifts and asks why we can't get those. The answer is that we are not doing anything exciting enough to get the money. Part of the problem is that people are so risk averse. Nobody seems to want to take the risk. We need to design an ecosystem to really empower people to think outside the box. What are those ideas that nobody else has done that would make us unique.

There was wide variety in assessment or their view for why strategic plans fail.

The data in this section is diverse enough that a formal conclusion is not offered.

Rather, the findings presented highlight that at least one participant from each institution believe that strategic plan assessment is difficult or held a personal view as to why strategic plans failed.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this dissertation was to address a number of research questions developed to help recognize the role of strategic planning in public land-grant institutions of higher education in the United States. Specifically, the study sought to understand the following questions from the perspective of the participants:

1. What is the primary purpose for developing a strategic plan at the institution or unit level?
2. Are institution-wide and unit strategic plans linked to the budget and resource allocation process?
3. Is there a relationship between institution or unit strategic plans with external marketing and fundraising activities?
4. Are institution-wide strategic plans used to align work activities to the goals of the CEO or Provost or how are unit strategic plans used to align work activities to the goals of the unit leader (e.g. Deans, Vice-CEOs, Vice-Provosts, etc.)?
5. Are institution-wide or unit strategic plans used when interacting with government and legislative personnel?
6. How do strategic planning leaders know if a strategic plan was successful at their institution and what are the measures for determining success?

In Chapter 5, I use the findings to discuss the research questions while drawing

conclusions. I add my personal perspective as the researcher in combination with the qualitative data to present conclusions as well as recommendations for the higher education community.

### **Question 1: The Primary Purpose for Developing a Strategic Plan**

The primary purpose for developing a strategic plan based on the participants perspective varied with each participant. The total number of participants for the study was eighteen. Around the point of saturation at participant fourteen, where no new information was being revealed in the study, a general theme had emerged where each institution utilized the institutional strategic plan in a certain way. Later, I reviewed the website of each of the six institutions to understand how they publicly presented their institutional strategic plan and the related activities surrounding its development, implementation, and assessment. It occurred to me then that a spectrum existed among the institutions where on one end of the spectrum there was an aspirational approach, on the opposite end of the spectrum there was a greater expectation for implementation, and the remaining institutions were somewhere in-between.

As discussed in the literature review, very little scholarly research exists on the topic of strategic planning in higher education. This fact is very surprising considering how much effort has been placed into strategic planning, implementation, and assessment processes. I searched additional online databases to understand if a strategic planning purpose spectrum concept for higher education institutions existed. I was unable to find this concept through searching and as a result, have developed this spectrum from the six participant institutions.

The spectrum contains five categories of institutional strategic plan purpose. Each category is placed along an axis with institutions on the left having little to no expectation for implementing strategic plan outcomes with institutions on the right having a high level of expectation for implementing strategic plan outcomes. Each category of institution is then placed along the spectrum based on their definition. It is highly likely that additional categories of strategic plan purpose exist, which could be determined through additional research. The five categories of strategic plan purpose that were exhibited as a result of this research are aspirational, hybrid, executive-driven, budget-driven, and formal.

“Aspirational” strategic plans center on the notion that all or some of the major goals and objectives published in the institutional plan are not actually intended to be accomplished as they represent exceedingly difficult and long-term advancements necessary for their achievement.

Big State University participants affirmed that the institutional strategic plan was not intended to be implemented, rather, it was something to aspire toward. Participants actually used the term “aspirational” when discussing their institutional strategic plan and referenced public societal issues that could not be solved by a single institution alone. The BSU website does contain a few select initiatives that are focus areas for implementation, however, this is a very small portion of the overall plan.

The second category of strategic plan purpose based on the research findings is “hybrid.” The concept of a hybrid category reflects an institutional strategic plan with a variety of uses coupled with a low expectation for implementation at the institutional

level with an expectation that organizational-unit plans be implemented at the discretion of a Dean or executive leader. This category also includes a top-level executive, such as a CEO or CEO, determining a small number of important initiatives to them personally followed by promotion and implementation. Those initiatives do not necessarily need to be found in the institutional strategic plan. However, an institutional strategic plan is still developed in this category by using traditional committees with formal input processes and wide discussion among the university community.

Public Good University (PGU) is placed in this category as the CEO has their own small number of priorities alongside an institutional strategic plan that is created every five to ten years with input from the entire university. Some PGU organizational units have a strategic plan, though it is not required nor are unit leaders assessed by strategic plan performance.

In “executive-driven” strategic planning a top executive leader, such as the CEO or Provost, develops the strategic plan with a limited number of other executive leaders or the governing board. Shining Tower University (STU) has utilized an executive-driven approach with the entrance of their most recent CEO. The current CEO abandoned the previous strategic planning approach, developed a brief strategic plan, shared the plan with the board of trustees for input, and then directed executive leaders to implement a small number of initiatives found in the plan that were important to the CEO and the governing board. In parallel, STU transitioned their strategic planning website to promote marketing-centric accomplishments and highlighted their focus toward prospective students by advertising accomplishments made by flattening tuition

costs. This category, from the perspective of the researcher, does imply a focus toward implementing the institutional strategic plan, however, the focus is on a small number of objectives in the plan that are important to the CEO and the governing board. The actual number cannot be confirmed as the CEO or governing board does not publish this plan. This is the least participatory form of strategic planning.

The fourth category of strategic plan purpose based on the research findings is “budget-driven.” This category reflects a strategic planning process that requires an annual submission of strategic goals by both academic and non-academic organizational units to a central budget planning function. The purpose of the process is to justify requests for funding allocations based on initiatives that have some form of a strategic purpose reflecting the institutional mission or stated goals by an executive leader.

Open Book University participants affirmed that the institutional strategic planning process was actually a budget planning exercise. This was affirmed through review of their website, as the strategic planning responsibility actually rests with a department responsible for financial planning and budgeting. The OBU website offers “planning instructions” to organizational units where they must justify their short-term priorities that require funding in the next one to two years following by long-term funding requests that need three or more years of funding. This process also justifies requests for building space, reviews unit reserve funding balances, reviews and requests full-time equivalent employee counts, and requires performance metrics. What is unclear from the OBU website is what occurs when an institution does not meet performance metrics from the previous year with respect to how it impacts their budget

request for the coming year. OBU also utilizes a budget approach where remaining fund balances are not expected to roll-over to the following year and there is an expectation of at least a “1% reduction in funding” to the base budget each year until retainment of funds can be justified. This category, from the perspective of the researcher, implies a strong focus toward implementation given that the strategic goals are used to justify fund balances and if those goals are not met, then there is no expectation of retaining the funding unless a justification is given such that it could not be spent in a single year or required an encumbrance over multiple years.

“Formal” strategic planning utilizes input from a wide variety of stakeholders across the university with one or more committees involved in the development. In formal strategic planning, all organizational units are required to develop an organizational-unit strategic plan and are formally assessed on their progress. The formal planning process utilizes a central strategic planning office that ensures accountability among all organizational units to develop their plan with a consistent format, collects metrics among organizational units, and publishes the plans and metrics on a public website. There is a strong expectation of implementation and the strategic plan is used to support both fundraising and government relations campaigns. This is the traditional form of strategic planning found commonly in literature.

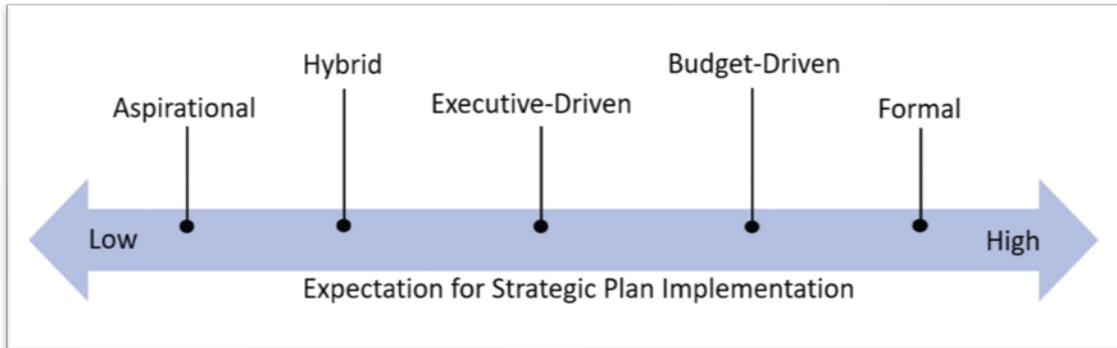
Grand State University (GSU) and Morrill Act University (MAU) fall into the formal category. GSU uses a periodic strategic planning process, requires all organizational units to submit plans, assesses Dean performance based on their

organizational-unit plan performance, and publishes organizational-unit score cards to indicate organizational-unit and institutional performance.

Like GSU, MAU has a periodic strategic planning process and requires all organizational units to submit plans. Unlike GSU, MAU is required to submit an institutional strategic plan to the governing board and the CEO acts as more of a facilitator to the process with a cultural expectation for injecting little input into the development of themes and objectives. MAU does not publish score cards and has a culture that rejects the concept of metrics. MAU invests several millions of dollars into a “seed grant” award program that promotes implementation of strategic plan objectives. While the lack of metrics would imply less focus toward strategic plan implementation, the employment of the seed grant program to encourage implementation, requirement by the governing board to submit a strategic plan, and low amount of executive influence over the planning process places MAU as the most formalized strategic planning approach found among the six institutions.

Figure 5.1 illustrates the placement of the strategic plan purpose categories along an axis that spans the level of expectation for implementation of strategic plan goals.

**Figure 5.1 Strategic Planning Purpose Spectrum**



The justification for placement of the categories along the expectation for strategic plan implementation axis follows a logic that was developed as a result of the literature review and the research findings. Aspirational plans have the lowest expectation for implementation and are written in such a way that the utilization of metrics is very difficult. Hybrid category institutions have moved one step away from aspirational in that there is some expectation for implementation of a small number of goals from the executive leader, however, organizational-unit plans remain optional and the institutional plan continues to appear as aspirational. In the case of BSU, they appear to be moving away from aspirational toward hybrid as the CEO recently chose a small number of initiatives to be implemented. While this is true, the expectation for shared governance at BSU does not lend itself to implementation and there is a strong environment of decentralized autonomy among organizational units with no oversight from the governing board or State. Similar to BSU, the PGU CEO selected a small number of goals important to them for implementation while utilizing the strategic

planning process, which were successfully implemented according to a PGU Dean, resulting in PGU's placement into the hybrid category.

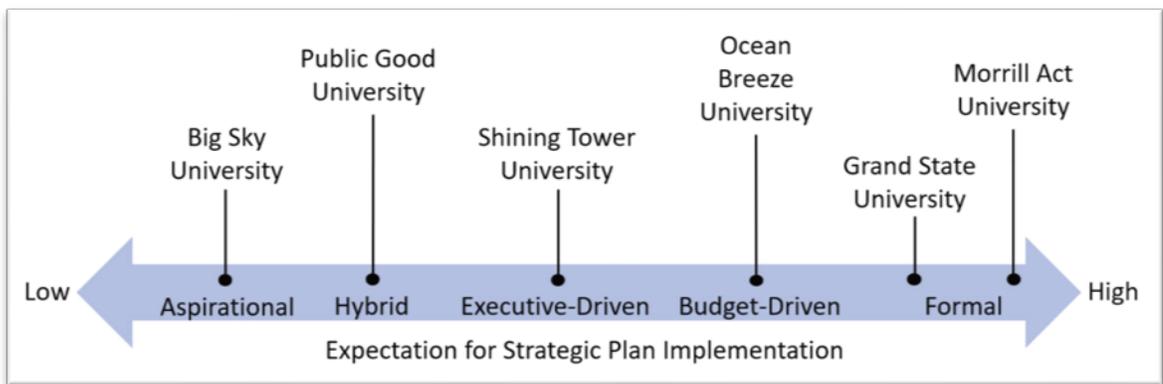
The executive-driven category falls closer to formal, but less than the budget-driven category. The reasoning for this is that the budget-driven process implies a high expectation for implementation as funds could be removed from organizational-units when strategic plan goals are not offered or implemented. While the executive-driven category is more of a process-centric category than a purpose, it cannot be excluded as a category since it does create a purpose for strategic planning, which is to satisfy the directive of the CEO. While the CEO can direct efforts toward their desired goals, in a decentralized institution, the goals are mostly implemented by organizational-units. STU experienced executive-driven with little participation while OBU had broader participation and was tied to the budget. The incentive to implement goals when connected to either funding gains or losses is broader as it requires all organizational units to be mindful of their strategic goals as opposed to organizational units directly impacted by the CEO's preferred objectives.

In the case of OBU, the CEO and Provost oversee the budget planning process and award budgets based on their preferred objectives. While STU could potentially veer into the budget-driven category, no information was presented by participants to suggest the CEO closely monitored the budgeting process in relation to their goals, nor was this information apparent from the STU website.

Formal institutions are situated near the highest expectation for implementation due to either a strong requirement for periodic metrics and public reporting of

implementation progress or a requirement to submit institutional plans to the governing board. These institutions utilize a comprehensive strategic planning approach that can leverage hundreds of individuals in the process and require several millions of dollars to encourage strategic plan implementation while separating the budget process. Figure 5.2 illustrates the placement of the institutions in the study along an axis that spans the categories and level of expectation for implementation of strategic plan goals.

**Figure 5.2 Strategic Planning Spectrum Placement of Studied Institutions**



While the purpose of strategic planning is illustrated as a spectrum, there are several nuances recognized. Essentially, the purpose of strategic planning is based on the institution, its leaders, and its culture. Each institution studied had its own unique purpose for strategic planning and no two participants responded to the first research question in the same way.

The purpose of strategic planning can also change over time with executive leaders. BSU had long utilized an aspirational strategic planning process, but that is now shifting toward a hybrid approach as a result of their new CEO. STU would have been categorized as a hybrid institution, but shifted to executive-driven with the arrival of

their CEO who focused on the relationship with the governing board and their own individual goals for the institution. OBU shifted to budget-driven as the result of a financial crisis in 2011 coupled with frequent turnover among executive leaders. GSU and MAU have shifted very little over the past ten years, while it could be argued that MAU has edged toward more formality through the use of their seed grant program. The resulting conclusion is that those institutions anchored in the formal category have a process and culture that can withstand executive turnover. Institutions in all other strategic plan purpose categories are subject to movement between categories as executive leaders and financial trends move the purpose of strategic planning in the absence of a process and culture that would not tolerate sudden movement between categories.

### **Question 2: Linkage between Strategic Planning and the Budget Process**

The second research question sought to understand if either institutional or organizational-unit strategic plans were linked to the budget or resource allocation process for the institution. Deans and former Deans were able to answer this question directly. However, development and institutional planning participants had difficulty answering this question. While I will offer conclusions on this research question, there is an opportunity for additional research on this question that would provide a firm conclusion through interviewing budget officers, chief financial officers, and individuals in roles responsible for financial management at the executive level within an institution.

There is a clear relationship between strategic planning and the budget process at OBU. The OBU website offers “planning instructions” to organizational units where

they must justify their short-term priorities from the strategic plan to request funding. OBU participants also affirmed the strategic planning and budget planning process. However, this is not the case for the other institutions.

At BSU, an aspirational category institution, there is no connection between strategic planning and the budget planning process according to all three participants. A BSU participant stated flatly that “there was no connection” and that “the institution was facing another multi-million-dollar budget shortfall and the strategic plan would have no impact on how the budget shortfall would be addressed.”

At PGU, a hybrid category institution, a PGU Participant shared that “it depended on the unit and that the CEO was working to ensure that budgets follow goals.” However, these goals are not necessarily connected to the strategic plan. PGU lives up to its role as a hybrid category institution, using the strategic plan for driving budget priorities when it wants to and discarding its usage in other cases.

At STU, an executive-driven category institution, an STU participant stated that “there is a direct connection because once a strategic initiative is established by the CEO, that is where the money goes. It does not go to other things that may have been funded in the past.” Given that implementing outcomes related to the budget are a motivator for someone seeking to continue receipt of certain funding types, there is a high likelihood of a connection between the executive-driven strategic plan and the budget planning process based at STU.

GSU, a formal strategic planning category institution, does connect the strategic planning process to the annual budget process through prioritization. A GSU participant

stated that “the budgeting process is separate from the strategic planning process; however, budget priority is given to those items that are connected to the strategic plan.” In review of the GSU strategic plan website, multiple strategic plan related committees have a responsibility to make recommendations on funding allotments in support of their respective component of the strategic plan.

MAU, the highest formal category institution, does not connect the strategic plan to the budget planning process. However, the institution manages a multi-million-dollar program with large “seed grants” intended to promote strategic initiatives. According to one MAU participant, “the strategic plan is not directly linked to the budget process. At the unit level, there are discussions about having clear strategic plans that will be used with the budget process, but we have not done this yet.”

To answer if either institutional or organizational-unit strategic plans were linked to the budget or resource allocation process for the institution, the answer is, it depends. OBU very clearly, and publicly, connects strategic goals to its annual budget planning process. GSU and STU connect their strategic plan to the annual budget planning process by prioritizing investments, however, the process is far less clear than the process employed by OBU. MAU does not directly connect strategic planning to the budget process, however, they fund a significant program intended to provide funds to encourage strategic plan priorities. PGU connects its strategic plan to the annual budget process in certain cases, but this process is not consistent nor published. BSU does not connect their aspirational strategic plan to the budget process.

In summary, most institutions in the study connect strategic plans, or strategic goals, to the budget planning process in their own unique ways. The linkage is not formal and is loosely coupled based on the culture of the institution and executive leadership at a point in time. It seems probable that BSU has the potential to develop a strategic plan to budget process relationship, however, they have experienced year over year budget cuts that most likely have impacted their ability to fund strategic investments in such a way. In fact, that very problem was what led OBU to move into the budget-driven strategic planning category once they entered a period of financial relief following budget cuts.

As the researcher, my concluding thoughts are that a relationship between strategic planning and budget processes does exist, but are truly unique to the institution, the culture, and its executive leaders for how they choose to use strategic plans or strategic goals.

### **Question 3: The Strategic Planning Relationship with Marketing & Fundraising**

The third research question sought to understand if a relationship between institution or organizational-unit strategic plans and marketing or fundraising activities existed. Government relations or fundraising leaders were able to directly answer the question.

As shown in the research findings, across all six institutions, at least two or more participants provided examples of institutional fundraising activities that used the strategic plan to engage donors. In most cases, donor engagement occurred as strategic plans were developed and donors were then sought to help fund important initiatives

within the plan. This occurred at both the institutional level and organizational-unit plan level with CEOs, Provosts, Deans, CEOs, Fundraising Leaders, and the like turning out to support fundraising efforts.

In review of the MAU development website, the institution has a multi-billion-dollar fundraising campaign goal with several statistics located on the website that indicate fundraising progress. While the website is separate from the strategic plan website, numerous strategic plan themes are found on the website with some pages linking back to the strategic plan. Further, statements released by the MAU CEO regarding fundraising reference strategic plan themes by name.

GSU also closely coordinates the use of the strategic plan in support of fundraising. This was affirmed through review of the GSU website, as the organization created a Strategy Management Office (SMO) whose purpose was to coordinate implementation of the institutional strategic plan and coordinate the associated fundraising efforts. The SMO has an experienced executive leader who reports to the GSU CEO and highlights fundraising accomplishments on their website.

GSU also places fundraising goals in both institutional and organizational-unit plans themselves. From the participant statements, review of the GSU website, and establishment of a SMO that coordinates fundraising efforts with the strategic plan, it is clear that a relationship between strategic planning, fundraising, and marketing is evident at GSU.

OBU, the budget-driven category institution, highlighted fundraising efforts that utilized the strategic plan at the organizational-unit level as expressed by OBU

participants. However, they do not connect strategic planning to fundraising on their public website.

PGU does appear to have a robust capital campaign website that connects each strategic plan theme on the website with a set of priority initiatives along with impact stories that highlight how prior giving has already improved PGU across a variety of areas. What is interesting is that the capital campaign website links to individual pages for each college with a set of initiatives where donors can support those initiatives. However, at the college level, there is no apparent connection to the strategic plan or their respective organizational-unit plans. This is due to the optional requirement for organizational units to develop and publish strategic plans.

A review of the STU website reveals a multi-billion-dollar capital campaign published on a dedicated website with numerous marketing videos, brochures, and attention-grabbing headlines highlighting progress made as a result of donations. The STU CEO is shown on the website and their fundraising efforts and achievements are highlighted, however, it cannot be determined from the website if the efforts are connected to the strategic plan. This is due to the absence of the executive-driven strategic plan being published on a website such that it can be reviewed. However, the presence of the CEO on the fundraising website with highlights surrounding their achievements indicates some connection to the CEO's strategic plan. STU participants believe that the strategic plan is connected to fundraising and that the CEO personally leads this effort.

At BSU, the aspirational category institution, the University maintains a dedicated capital campaign website with a multi-billion-dollar goal. The website references the diminishing amount of state-funded support and offers deep gratitude to donors for “pulling the University through difficult times.” There are no apparent connections to the BSU strategic plan on the website. In review of the BSU strategic plan website, there are also no connections to fundraising, however, there is a financial working group whose charge is to make recommendations for a sustainable funding model. A report provides information on how BSU can achieve a sustainable model, although there is no evidence of action toward implementing the recommendations on the website. From the public surface, it would appear that BSU does not use the strategic plan for fundraising, however, one BSU participant close to the CEO did provide detailed comments outlining how the CEO uses the plan with donors.

Within the institutions studied, the use of strategic plans as fundraising and marketing tools, either at the institution or organizational-unit level, has been strongly affirmed. Participants regularly stated the plan was effective in guiding fundraising. A subsequent study could be conducted to examine factors that influence the effectiveness of strategic plans as fundraising tools given the amount of effort put into the development of strategic plans, especially for institutions in the formal category. This is in comparison to STU, whose CEO asked for input from a select number of executives, developed the plan with the governing board, and then went to work on fundraising while giving fundraising directives to the Deans. The executive-driven approach at STU has far less overhead than GSU, but are the returns better with the GSU method? Are

there other benefits that are difficult to measure that do not relate to fundraising, government relations, and alignment toward common goals?

In every institution, a development office existed and all institutions had a multi-billion-dollar campaign goal. While BSU had the weakest connection between strategic planning and advancement, their development officer expressed interest in developing this connection further. My research merely scratches the surface of using strategic plans as fundraising tools. Considering that all institutions were seeking multi-billion-dollar revenue streams and had experienced diminished state-funded revenue in the past, it seems wise for scholars to apply research for the purpose of surfacing the many nuances of the relationship between strategic planning and fundraising. I leave this research with more questions than answers having only the satisfaction of knowing that the relationship does indeed exist.

#### **Question 4: Aligning Work Activities to the Goals of the CEO or Provost**

The fourth research question was intended to recognize if strategic plans, either at the institutional level or organizational-unit level were intended to align work activities across the institution to the CEO or Provost. Participants across all institutions were able to address this question during the interview process.

Within the participants studied at GSU, the institutional strategic plan is used to align work activities across the institution to strategic objectives sought by the CEO and the Provost. In review of the GSU website, extensive information is found covering unit-level strategic planning, however, there are no public documents available that describe the process shared by the participants.

Unlike GSU, the MAU plan was not built around the CEO's vision. An MAU

Participant offered the following.

At the level of the CEO and Provost, the strategic plan was not really built around their vision, but the Provost is definitely trying to implement the strategic plan as it was drafted. I don't think the strategic plan was necessarily their vision, but they are certainly trying to make it happen. The CEO is also supportive.

At the college level, the strategic plan was here before I arrived and was developed by a reasonable process. A lot of people didn't expect much to happen with it and that we were going to put it on the shelf. We have given reports at faculty meetings on how we are tracking on things. There are some things I would have done before the strategic plan, but I felt that people used a reasonable process and I decided we should use it. The vision and the hopes that people had in the strategic plan far exceeded our resources and so we have to set priorities.

The statements among MAU participants highlight a different response to aligning work activities across the institution to the CEO or Provost as compared to GSU. The comments give the appearance that the CEO is not in the driver-seat of the strategic plan vehicle, however, I question how much this could actually be true.

Shining Tower University (STU), an executive-driven category institution, offered participant responses that cited examples of work alignment activities to the CEO. One STU participant, in response to question four, stated that "it is pretty strong here at STU. It is clear to everyone what the strategic goals are. The CEO empowers them to do it [implement strategic goals]." While the executive-driven strategic plan is used to align work activities to the CEO at STU, there do appear to be unique challenges with the colleges and the faculty senate that make this model difficult to manage, in part because it is very executive-driven in a culture that utilized shared governance before their arrival. At STU, the executive-driven strategic plan is used to align work activities of the institution and there is certainly pressure from the governing board to do so given

that they were part of the development of the plan. It is interesting to note that the STU CEO appeared to have trouble with aligning work activities in the colleges and among faculty. This is likely related to the fact that the Provost is not involved in the implementation process and faculty were not invited to participate in the develop of the executive-driven strategic plan.

Big State University (BSU), an aspirational category institution, does not appear to align work activities to the CEO based on participant comments. However, the BSU website does display three CEO initiatives associated with the strategic plan for which committees are actively reviewing ways to develop tangible outcomes that would fulfill those strategic initiatives.

Like BSU, PGU does not consistently use the strategic plan to align work activities to the CEO, however, the CEO does maintain a small number of initiatives that are important priorities for which executive staff are expected to implement those initiatives. Using the strategic planning purpose spectrum, aspirational and hybrid institutions do not clearly use the strategic plan to align work activities to the highest executive leaders. This is likely coupled with the low expectation for implementation of the institutional strategic plan, leading the PGU CEO to develop their own set of priorities and expect that work activities of executive leaders align to those initiatives. At BSU, the unique culture of the institution could have a role in the CEOs ability to enact major changes since they are a “weak-dean” institution according to a BSU participant, meaning that faculty and faculty governance bodies carry the greatest influence and ability to enact change.

At STU, the executive-driven strategic plan is used to align work activities of the institution and there is certainly pressure from the governing board to do so given that they were part of the development of the plan. It is interesting to note that the STU CEO appeared to have trouble with aligning work activities in the Colleges and among faculty. This is likely related to the fact that the Provost is not involved in the implementation process and faculty were not invited to participate in the develop of the executive-driven strategic plan.

While the OBU strategic planning process is used to align work activities to the CEO and Provost, it appears to align work activities more to the executive leaders of the institution that report to the CEO or Provost in addition to the CEO and Provost themselves. Based on comments from participants, analysis of the budget process, and review of the budget request forms, there are detailed conversations annually among the executive cabinet for setting strategic goals in connection with funding. This appears to strongly influence executive leaders to carry-out their strategic objectives since the loss or gain of funding is involved in aligning work activities of their respective organizational units. With the CEO and Provost in control of this process, the strategic planning process itself is used to align work activities to the CEO or Provost, albeit not directly given that the initiatives are mostly determined by executive leaders and their organizational-unit leaders.

GSU has a clear expectation for alignment to the CEO and Provost, with the Provost directly responsible for implementation. It is important to note that alignment of work activities is coupled with organizational-unit plans, as all organizational units are

required to publicly post their plans, renew them every five years, and annually submit reports outlining alignment of work activities of an organizational-unit plan to the institutional plan.

In summary of the conclusions for each institution, alignment of work activities, from the perspective of the researcher, follows the strategic planning purpose spectrum. On the left side of the spectrum, aspirational and hybrid institutions have less expectation of aligning work activities to the CEO or Provost using the strategic plan. The executive-driven category has an expectation for alignment, although it appears to be a challenge to do so among college leaders and faculty in the colleges.

Shifting to the right-side of the spectrum, the budget-driven strategic plan process is used to align work activities to the CEO or Provost, though in a unique way since the process leans heavily on executive leaders to submit goals that the CEO or Provost then approves. Alignment of work activities to the CEO or Provost is highest in the formal institutions, albeit with a unique variation. GSU most clearly uses the strategic plan to align work activities to the CEO or Provost, however, this is for debate at MAU due to their uniquely independent strategic planning process and culture.

#### **Question 5: The Strategic Planning Relationship with Government Relations**

The fifth research question sought to understand if a relationship existed between strategic planning and government relations. The use of an institutional or organizational-unit strategic plan as a government fundraising tool was frequently found across four institutions in the study, infrequently found in one institution, and not found at all in one institution. MAU, GSU, PGU, and STU frequently utilized the strategic

plan as a government influence tool. In the case of MAU and GSU, a formal process existed to coordinate government influence efforts across the University through the use of the strategic plan. PGU did not have a formal process across the University, however, they displayed a strong government relations office that worked to use the strategic plan or important initiatives for the University as a government influence tool. STU periodically used the CEO-driven and Provost-approved strategic plan to request appropriations for construction. The research findings indicate that a strategic plan can be used as a government influence tool. However, this was not the case in all institutions studied. Further, there appears to be a need for a coordinated effort by an organizational-unit, such as a dedicated government relations office, to ensure the effort is effective.

While OBU had utilized the strategic plan as a government influence tool in a few cases, this was infrequent due to the decentralized autonomy found among the state government culture that appeared to contribute to the lack of coordinated use of the strategic plan as a government influence tool. BSU claimed that their aspirational strategic plan was not used as a government influence tool, however, there was interest in growing their capability to do so even though there was some relational distance with the state government as a result of diminished funding levels that had occurred over the past decade.

It was interesting to find that both BSU and OBU, which expressed the least use of the strategic plan as a government influence tool, referenced how low the state appropriations were for their institution. At first, I believed that the relationship between

strategic planning and government relations could be connected to the strategic planning purpose spectrum, where aspirational or hybrid category institutions would have little use of the strategic plan as a government relations tool. While I do believe there is a connection to low use of the strategic plan for government relations in aspirational or hybrid environments like PGU, this is not the only factor. The culture of the state government in terms of the relationship with higher education institutions appears to be an important factor as to whether or not the plan is used for advocacy with the state government. Additional research should be conducted across land-grant institutions with low state appropriations levels to understand if this has discouraged their government influence efforts to receive state appropriations using the strategic plan as compared to seeking funding from donors.

#### **Question 6: Knowing that a Strategic Plan was Successful**

The sixth research question sought to understand how participants recognized when a strategic plan was successful. An entire theme was developed earlier in this document as a result of findings that were presented. I will use this section to offer a conclusion without an extensive revisit of the findings presented throughout the fourth theme.

At the institutional plan level, no institution used a consistent framework to assess the performance of the strategic plan. It was an interesting finding that the GSU CEO was considering ways to conduct institutional strategic plan assessment, which could result in GSU moving toward a formal institutional assessment process in the coming years if the CEO continues to stay in office.

A PGU participant believed that institutional strategic plan assessment was “more challenging than organizational-unit plan assessment.” I agree with this statement based on the findings and review of strategic plans at the six institutions. Further, based on the research in the study this is due to the way in which the institutional strategic plan objectives are written in order to be open to wide interpretation such that organizational units can apply the objectives in their respective disciplines. Of more interest to me was an OBU participant who believed that “higher education doesn’t really do this [institutional plan assessment].”

Organizational-unit plans are different in that they are written more specifically than institutional strategic plans, and as a result, contain objectives that are more often able to be measured. In the case of GSU, all organizational units must have strategic plans with objectives and metrics that correspond to individual score cards indicating progress through a red, yellow, or green status assessment. While the score card practice at GSU is not in place at any of the other institutions studied, the practice of encouraging organizational unit strategic plan assessment is active at MAU. It would seem that GSU is very effective at measuring organizational-unit plans based on their website.

In summary, institutional strategic plans are not only difficult to assess, they are rarely assessed at all. In contrast, organizational unit plans are not only assessed, but they are assessed even in environments where assessment is not required. The Deans interviewed in this study included performance metrics in their organizational-unit strategic plan and spoke in detail about the importance of doing so.

In thinking about publishing marketing-centric institutional plan metrics, I originally questioned whether or not it was wrong to do this as I considered STU. I felt this way as it seemed as though they had diluted the opportunity to show clear performance at the institution like GSU does through score cards. As I reflected on this further, it may not necessarily be a bad thing in their case. Using an executive-driven plan with input from the governing board coupled with the absence of organizational units being required to submit a plan, it would seem that marketing-centric metrics were a viable approach as compared to having no metrics at all. A supplemental study on the use of marketing-centric metrics intended to target donors and prospective students could prove useful. Perhaps GSU, or any of the other institutions, should be doing this as well.

### **Final Recommendations and Conclusions**

Considerable more research should be given to strategic planning at public land-grant institutions. As noted in the literature review, there is little research on this topic and the field is dominated by business-sourced literature that did not occur at non-profit organizations, such as public higher education. Further, this study focused on only six institutions among the seventy land-grant institutions across the United States. Additional variables to strategic planning would almost certainly be revealed at land-grants with smaller student populations, smaller endowments, or different research expenditure levels, to name only a few. I dare say that such a study that spanned all land-grants could yield a different strategic planning spectrum and reveal numerous new

and undiscovered variables that are important when considering whether to use strategic planning as a long-term planning tool in higher education.

The need for planning to guide public land-grant institutions of higher education is extraordinarily important, especially considering the challenges associated with variability in state funding and the strong desire from the general public to maintain flat tuition rates. I do not argue that planning is unnecessary, however, I question whether strategic planning as the method for conducting planning efforts is the best approach? Based on this study, the way in which strategic planning is conducted, how such plans are implemented, and whether or not they are assessed, depends on four factors. Before considering the factors, it is critical for CEO's and CAO's to look before they leap in an effort to know what they hope to accomplish. For example, is there a desire to increase research revenue, promote campus unity, develop budgets guided by formal planning, curry support for administrative leadership and their initiatives, offer evidence for individuals outside the institution that there is a vision and an effective administration, and the like. The first step is to understand the intended outcomes and then to consider the following factors.

The first factor is time. Executive leaders, such as the CEO or CAO, who are considering strategic planning must carefully evaluate how much time they are willing to invest to create a strategic plan. In the case of Morrill Act University, their strategic planning effort can require hundreds of hours that span across several months and leverage numerous committees and intensely coordinated activities. Institutions that are

not accustomed to such a process should not be quick to embrace a process that is so intensive unless they see the need and are committed to the results.

A key second aspect of the time factor is executive time in office. Strategic plans are unwise if the CEO or CAO has only a few years to remain in office. The common cycle is that a new CEO or CAO will want to create a new strategic plan or substantially update the previous strategic plan, potentially undermining much of the previous effort. For Morrill Act University, this is necessary as the CEO is required by the governing board to present a strategic plan that the board must approve and those plans are in five year increments. Depending on the entry of the CEO within the five year cycle, it is important to move quickly on developing a strategic plan to fulfill board and institutional expectations. At the organizational-unit level, Grand State University actually requires that new Deans develop a new strategic plan or revise the existing strategic plan for their college within the first year of their tenure. With the shortening of strategic plan horizons from ten and twenty year periods to three and five year periods, it is wise to determine the entry point of the CEO in the strategic plan cycle and determine how much effort to place on development activities. When choosing to use strategic planning, I recommend a process that does not require several months to complete that will allow enough time so that the plan may be used to raise funds and enact a number of important changes sought by the CEO or CAO before they leave the institution.

The second factor is place. Depending on the institution culture, the expectation for shared governance, current level of faculty satisfaction with executive administration, and the expectation for how the plan will be used in that specific

institution are important factors of place. Consider the difference between Big State University (BSU) and Open Book University (OBU). BSU has a strong expectation for shared governance coupled with an expectation that the plan is used to document aspirations and institutional identity. Using a strategic plan to solve a financial crisis would be unwise in such a place. Whereas at OBU, a financial crisis nearly a decade ago fundamentally changed the purpose of the strategic plan toward a budget planning tool. In that place, the plan is more useful for financial planning, but would have little value in satisfying shared governance expectations.

The third factor is leadership style. Consider the effect at Shining Tower University (STU) from the dramatic shift to an executive-driven approach. This was costly to the CEO with respect to the relationship with the faculty. However, it did suit the leadership style of the executive leader. The question is whether there was benefit in this approach in terms of positive gains as compared to the previous approach to planning. Leadership style and the factor of place, especially with respect to shared governance, are directly correlated and cannot be overlooked. Something as seemingly benign as changing the strategic planning method can have consequences with specific stakeholder groups. Conversely, if a CEO's or CAO's leadership style is to avoid strategic planning in favor of some form of planning that more closely fits their leadership style, then this can be perfectly acceptable in the institution has little expectation for shared governance through strategic planning. This appeared to work well for the CAO at Public Good University. Whereas such flexibility would not be afforded to the CEO of Morrill Act University.

The fourth factor is economic conditions. In the case of BSU, there were frequently challenges in receiving funding from the state, therefore the strategic plan was useful in securing the requires revenue from other sources. However, the plan would not be as useful for government influence during times of fiscal austerity. Conversely, Grand State University is actually required by the state to conduct strategic planning, which would require such planning to occur whether fiscal austerity measures were in place or not. In times of difficult economic conditions, and as experienced at OBU, strategic planning may not be a useful tool for addressing financial challenges. An aspirational or strategic plan that is only used for new ideas, does not work in times of austerity. Economic conditions could be explored in far greater detail than addressed in this paper and also couple with each of the previous factors to result in unique circumstances that CEO's and CAO's must consider.

Throughout the course of this research, it occurred to me that institutional strategic plans are indeed effective, but not for the reasons that we commonly believe and most certainly not through the lens of private industry authors or leaders that mostly focus on strategic plan implementation as the sole factor of effectiveness. At each institution, I believe strategic planning was effective in different ways. Nevertheless, I must ask "by what measure?" Can institutional strategic plans even be measured? Would you use the same measure to determine success as I would? The simple truth is that effectiveness typically reflects a quantitative measure, of which it is extremely difficult to assign a measure for an institutional strategic plan regardless of the category of institution (e.g. aspirational, formal, etc.) unless a separate measure such as

enrollment, research expenditures, and the like is used. So why continue to use this planning approach when there are at least thirty-five strategy implementation failure claims that prompted a scholarly study by Candido & Santos (2015) to sift through the concept of strategy failure? The answer, based on this research, is that strategic plans can have purpose in a number of different ways that have nothing to do with implementation. Truly, it is up to the institution, unless of course, it is required by a governing board as found at MAU.

Institutional strategic plans were shown in this study to be effective tools for fundraising at both the institutional level and organizational-unit level, namely in the colleges. There were several fundraising success stories from Deans and executive leaders describing innovative cross-disciplinary degree programs funded by donors, the funding of large construction projects, the continuation of important environmental quality programs, advanced research programs, and numerous other examples where the strategic plan was used to raise funds for important strategic plan initiatives. This occurred regardless of the strategic plan purpose category of the institution or the level of quality in the publicly published strategic plan. Given that fundraising is tremendously important to public institutions for a variety of reasons, if strategic plans are an effective tool for fundraising millions of dollars, then they should continue to be used if not for that reason alone.

Institutional strategic plans were proven in this study to be useful tools for government relations, though not in every case. This is different from fundraising in that there may not be a measurable return on effort since the outcome could result in an

intangible benefit from the state. True, some institutions received additional funding through their government relations effort using the strategic plan, but many did not. A few institutions were very effective at leveraging a coordinated effort that resulted in either additional funding by the state legislature or upheld the image of the institution as a good investment compared to other investments by the state. Yet, some institutions operated in states where the legislature would be unaffected by a government relations effort using the strategic plan due to the culture of the state government, as was the case for OBU and BSU. Still others want to get into the game of using the strategic plan as a government relations tool such as PGU. Unlike the use of strategic plans as fundraising tools, using them as a government relations tool may not make sense for reasons outside the control of the institution and there will be less measurable benefits as compared to fundraising.

Most certainly a strategic plan can be used as a marketing tool. STU excelled at this with an extremely well-designed website that offered several convincing reasons for a prospective student to attend the institution based on how well the institution managed its finances, operations, delivery of academic outcomes, investment into research, and so on. Considering that strategic plans are certainly used for fundraising, why not go all the way and build attractive marketing websites that utilize strategic plan objectives or couple the objectives with capital campaign sites? GSU and PGU integrated their capital campaign site with numerous strategic plan objectives and it appeared to give the capital campaign website a certain amount of validity that I did not observe in the BSU website.

Institutional strategic plans can be used to align the institution to the priorities of the CEO or Provost. In the case of large public land-grant institutions, it is wise for a CEO or Provost to pick their focus areas as opposed to expecting that this will occur holistically across the institution unless they are willing to invest into a formal program like GSU. Should they choose to follow the GSU path, it is also wise to assess the culture of the institution to recognize if the culture would reject the GSU approach, as was the case at MAU and BSU.

It is my belief that organizational unit plans are more important than institutional plans. These plans are where outcomes have the best opportunity for implementation, where measures are possible, and where Deans can focus the energies of their faculty and staff, especially if they involve individual departments. Yet, it is of the utmost importance for Deans to involve faculty in the organizational-unit plan development as this was expressed by all Dean's interviewed. Considering these facts, it seems less important to me that an institutional strategic plan should take hundreds of people, countless committees, and research worthy of a dissertation to complete. While they should continue to be used as a guide for the organizational unit plans, perhaps they do not require such a massive effort. Academic and non-academic executive leaders should be strongly encouraged, or even required depending on the culture of the institution, to develop organizational-unit plans as they can be effective tools to improve the outcomes of their organizational-unit if they involve the college or non-academic division, actively measure progress, give the needed resources for implementation, and of course, use the plan for fundraising either externally or internally.

Regardless of technique, the amount of success will vary. The important principle here is to avoid organizational-unit plans that “sit on the shelf,” wasting the precious time given from faculty and staff in organizational units who already have very little time to give.

In the case of BSU, requiring organizational unit strategic plans would likely be met with resistance and there appears to be very little financial reward available from the CEO due to budget constraints. In contrast, MAU offers numerous grants that are often awarded to Colleges that are intended to support implementation of programs and they can then return to the budget cycle to request operational support to keep programs active once implemented. The important practice is to do the needed work within an organizational-unit, which is where much of the outcomes occur, using whatever technique helps advance the unit. If that technique is best found through organizational-unit strategic plans, then use them.

Should institutional strategic planning continue to occur in public land-grant institutions? My answer is a resounding yes, but only if executive leaders responsible for the plan intend to use them to support fundraising, marketing, government relations, budget-planning, or finding support for innovative programs on the horizon. CEOs and Provosts should proceed with caution if they choose to develop an institutional strategic plan out of obligation since one already existed in order to say they have a plan, or worse, as a sign of executive competency. “Checking the box” by completing an institutional strategic plan is a waste of an executive leader’s time and the time of countless other individuals used to develop the plan. Given the unfortunate phenomenon

of short executive tenure among CEOs or Provosts, this can leave the institution in the difficult position of starting the process over repeatedly, as some participants cited executive turnover as the primary reason why the institutional plans fail. Proceed with caution, determine the category of the institution, and expect to use the plan as opposed to publishing the plan and leaving it to digital decay.

GSU presented a novel practice and seems to understand that the true value is in organizational unit plans. They require a new Dean to either update or affirm their respective organizational-unit plan within the first year of their role. This allows the plan, if written well, to support active objectives in the plan that people are working on while allowing the new Dean to select what is important to them without rewriting the entire plan. While not required to do so, a PGU Dean and OBU Dean practiced this approach without being asked.

I leave this research with an important quote made in 1961 by Supreme Court Justice William Rehnquist, in his comments on the role of state involvement in *Burton v. Wilmington Parking Authority*, 365 U.S. 715. Justice Rehnquist stated that “only by sifting the facts and weighing the circumstances on a case-by-case basis can the nonobvious involvement of the State in private conduct be attributed to its true significance.” Based on the research in this dissertation, it is only by sifting the facts and weighing the circumstances on an institution-by-institution basis can the nonobvious effectiveness of strategic planning be attributed to a certain path. Executive leaders must assess their institution, the culture, the relationship with the state, the relationship with the governing board, the base of current or prospective donors, the institutional funding

needs, the past role of strategic planning, their relationship to Deans and non-academic executive leaders, and their own expected tenure in executive office before determining how best to chart the future when choosing to plan, develop, implement, or assess an institutional strategic plan.

## **Implications for Future Research**

The information gained from the eighteen leaders across six public land-grant institutions was significant. The research addressed six research questions, however, many more questions were raised as a result of participant responses that merit additional study. In this brief section, I present several research questions that could contribute to the study of strategic planning within higher education institutions.

While the research included a meaningful sample, this study reviewed only six of the fifty public land-grant institutions. Additionally, according to the Association of Public Land-Grant Institutions, there are twenty-one historically black land-grant institutions and twenty-nine tribal colleges and universities (APLGU, 2018) that have not been studied. Even more, this study has not applied the research questions to the numerous public or private four-year institutions that are not considered land-grant institutions. While the findings reflected by the participants in the six studied institutions are real, they do not necessarily reflect findings that would result from the same six research questions applied across a larger sample, for which there are several ways that additional groupings of institutions could be created.

Outside of applying the same research questions to larger or more diverse groupings of institutions, here I offer a numbered list of additional research questions that I identified during the course of this study.

1. What factors contribute to using an institutional strategic plan as a response to a financial crisis? As experienced at OBU, strategic planning ended following a financial crisis associated with a severe economic downturn. Are there times when some form of strategic planning could actually be useful to guide the institution through a financial crisis? A quantitative study would be useful for testing the participant claims in

this study that strategic planning is useful for fundraising.

2. Is there a distinct difference in the way that organizational-unit plans should be developed when comparing academic plans and non-academic plans? Feedback was received at Shining Tower University where an academic leader felt that it was significantly easier to develop strategic plans for non-academic units since they are considered to be support units. If this is true, perhaps multiple approaches are needed for strategic planning in institutions where such planning is required, as is the case at Grand State and Morrill Act University.
3. What level of involvement should faculty, staff, students, or administrators have in developing an institutional strategic plan in order to later support the use of the plan? This is truly a core question that seeks to understand if the level of involvement is worth the cost with respect to the time given by all of the participants. Morrill Act University spends a tremendous amount of time for strategic planning, but are the results actually worth it? What about an institution that spends a significant amount of time and has difficulty showing progress that is connected to the plan?
4. At what point in a CEO or Provost's tenure should they initiate the strategic planning process? A study could be conducted to determine the factors that are more ideal in year one versus year two and so on of a CEO's or CAO's tenure. An entirely different study could emerge here and the strategic plan would have a component in that study. This study would determine if strategic planning as a guide for an executive successor is beneficial or of little values.
5. How does the culture of an institution affect the institutional strategic planning process? Essentially, how do the expectations for shared governance impact the amount of planning needed? Is it really worth the time and energy needed to satisfy this expectation or could a series of conversations or actions shift the culture to a different expectation of shared governance that would result in a less intensive planning process? What methods would be useful to ensure that all faculty voices were heard, not just those that are outspoken in group planning sessions?
6. How does the culture of an academic College affect the organizational-unit strategic planning process for that College? This study did not explore cultural paradigms and shared governance within a College. I expect that this could vary greatly across disciplines such as engineering versus liberal arts. The results of this study must be applied in consideration of the cultural context for individual organizational-units

within an institution.

7. Is there a positive benefit to organizational-unit strategic plan outcomes when connected to the performance evaluation of an organizational-unit leader, specifically a Dean? Such a study would identify the specific institutions that currently use this approach and analyze the affect on performance by those Deans to understand if there was value in using this technique or not.
8. Does writing institutional strategic plan objectives in a flexible way encourage wide interpretation support alignment of organizational-unit plans? I received numerous responses when discussing assessment challenges that indicated it was nearly impossible to measure an institutional plan due to how it was written, however, I suspect that with subtle changes that assessment could be more easily accomplished.
9. Are strategic investment programs that offer funding to initiatives in support of the institutional strategic plan a positive return on investment? This would be a useful quantitative methodology study that tracked funding amounts against the return on investment for each initiative. Perhaps Morrill Act is wisely using their funds and other institutions should adopt their approach, or perhaps they wasting money.
10. Is there a relationship between fundraising performance by an organizational-unit leader and their success in the budget-planning cycle? This question could not be answered successfully in the study and requires a different set of participants to identify. The data would be of most interest to Deans.
11. Should aspirational institutional strategic plans with no intention of supporting fundraising or aligning work activities to executive leaders be abandoned? Consider the case of Big State University and their process. Are there other intangible benefits not recognized in this study that warrant continuing to use strategic planning as a tool even though there is little intention of implementation?
12. Are SMART goals an effective tool for organizational-unit plan assessment? This method of goal-setting is easily found in business literature and was referenced by a Dean during the study. Does the use of SMART goals encourage effective assessment of strategic plans, especially at the organizational-unit level?
13. How does executive turnover in the CEO or CAO role influence the institutional strategic planning process? This was covered in the final

recommendation section and could be very useful to determine timing and the amount of effort in strategic planning to avoid unnecessary wastes of time for strategic planning.

14. What factors contribute to an institution shifting between strategic plan purpose categories (e.g. aspirational, hybrid, executive-driven, budget-driven, and formal)? Studying more land-grant institutions is needed to first affirm the model. Once confirmed, determining how and when to shift between approaches would be of clear value to CEO's, CAO's, and strategic planning leaders.
15. Are there more categories of strategic plan purpose than what was identified in this study? I suspect that there are more categories that would be revealed if the sample of institutions were expanded or the types of participants selected among the existing sample were changed.
16. Should public land-grant institutions invest into formal processes within government relations offices to utilize the strategic plan to influence the relationship with the state when there are no cultural limitations? This seemed to be working very well at Grand State University and Morrill Act University, but would it work well for other institutions? Certainly there are other factors unique to each specific state and institution type that would influence how strategic plans were used for government relations.
17. Is there a return on investment for the cost associated with developing institutional strategic plans? If a reputable model could be created to accurately determine return on investment, this would be of immense value before beginning a strategic planning process.
18. Do accrediting bodies influence the organizational-unit planning process? One participant referenced a requirement by their accrediting body to conduct strategic planning for their institution. What happens when accrediting bodies and their method conflict with the governing board or expectations for shared governance? Since accrediting bodies typically focus on the implementation of outcomes that improve the delivery of education, why would an accrediting body embrace a form of planning that has a reputation for being difficult to implement?

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## APPENDIX A

### RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear [Enter Name],

My name is Joshua Kissee and I am in the process of writing a dissertation for the purpose of fulfilling the requirements of a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from Texas A&M University. The purpose of this study is to understand the rationale for strategic planning at public research-1 land-grant institutions in the United States. Based on your role as the [Enter Role], you have been selected as a participant in the study.

I would like to interview you on [Enter Date and Time] for approximately 45 minutes via telephone. This interview is at no cost, nor does it offer compensation. The interview transcript will remain confidential and is protected under research protocols found in the Texas A&M University – Institutional Review Board.

Would you be willing to participate in an interview?

Thank you for considering in advance,

Joshua Kissee  
Doctoral Student, Higher Education Administration  
Texas A&M University

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is the primary purpose for developing a strategic plan at the institution or unit level (e.g. college/division/etc.)?
2. How are institution-wide and unit strategic plans linked to the budget and resource allocation process?
3. Can you give me an example of how strategic planning is linked to fundraising?  
When a positive response is received, this question is supported by subsidiary questions:
  - a. What roles use the strategic plan in support of fundraising activities (e.g. CEOs, Provosts, Deans, etc.)?
  - b. How are strategic plans used to support fundraising activities?
  - c. When funds associated with strategic plans are received, how does this impact the priority of strategic plan initiatives or the budget allocation process?
4. How are institution-wide strategic plans used to align work activities to the goals of the CEO or Provost or how are unit strategic plans used to align work activities to the goals of the unit leader (e.g. Deans, Vice-CEOs, Vice-Provosts, etc.)?
5. Are there examples of how institution-wide or unit strategic plans are used to influence government or legislative bodies?
6. How do you know if a strategic plan was successful at your institution and what are the measures for determining success?

7. Has anything new occurred to you during the course of this interview?

## APPENDIX C

### REVIEW OF CASE-STUDY INSTITUTION'S STRATEGIC PLAN THEMES

Each institution within the study is a public land-grant institution with very high research expenditures and large endowments, albeit there is significant variability in the endowment between each institution. Participants expressed the need to address access and affordability within the institutional strategic plan and a corresponding theme was identified in each strategic plan reviewed.

According to Conner and Rabovsky (2011), the topic of access can be viewed through the lens of addressing unequal treatment of groups through creation of institutional policies designed to improve access to higher education among students of disadvantages backgrounds. These include students whose access to higher education is limited due to racial inequity, gender inequity, intergenerational inequity, and numerous other disadvantages that limit a student's access to education that is outside their direct control. Affordability addresses the topic of low-income and economically disadvantaged students that need financial support to attend a public college or university. The topic incorporates the debate surrounding merit-based versus need-based aid and the cost of attendance in contrast with student debt loads upon graduation.

At Grand State University (GSU), access and affordability were taken very seriously. The GSU executive leader responsible for outreach and engagement explained:

When we say that “access and affordability” is needed in the [institutional] strategic plan, then that means, primarily, student aid. This could happen in many

ways and signals that we need to raise more money in terms of scholarships and grants among our donors.

The institutional strategic planning process at GSU then directs individual Colleges to raise funds intended for scholarships and there are also measures to track the amount of funds raised in the annual strategic planning review process.

Morrill Act University (MAU) incorporated “access to education” as one of the top three priorities for the CEO. According to the MAU an executive leader responsible for institutional strategic planning and assessment:

We like to say that our “current campaign for fundraising” is closely aligned with the strategic plan. The CEO has 3 strategic priorities for the campaign (access to education, transformative experiences, etc.). When our Provost and CEO began going out to donors to talk about the campaign, they use the strategic plan as the launching point to move the conversation forward for these three priorities.

MAU deeply incorporates access into their institutional strategic plan through its commitment to educational access with a focus on the citizens of the State where MAU is located. The strategic plan goes on to directly address student debt, the cost of attendance, and the need for efficiency within operations in order to maintain cost.

Each institution, in its own way, addressed the need to ensure access and affordability for students. For each institution, I provide a table outlining the specific strategic plan phrase, the number of supporting goals, and the number of measures found for the goals.

**Table 5.1 Comparison of Access and Affordability Statements**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Strategic Plan Phrase</b>	<b>Supporting Goals</b>	<b>Number of Measures</b>
Grand State University	Access, Affordability, & Excellence	3	3
Big State University	Access & Diversity	4	0
Shining Tower University	Affordability & Accessibility	3	1
Open Book University	Access & Opportunity	1	1
Public Good University	Access & Affordability	1	1
Morrill Act University	Enabling Access to Education	3	1

Among the institutions reviewed, it is clear that maintaining affordable tuition, which correlates to student debt, was important. Further, providing access to diverse populations were important. At Public Good University (PGU), a Dean noted the following:

The CEO has their own 3-4 priorities. They have things that they want the campus to focus on. These are not related to the strategic plan and that is where campus-wide efforts are focused. For example, access to lower income students could relate back to the strategic plan, however, our CEO is more focused on this and it is completely independent from the strategic plan.

This statement highlights that while strategic planning does serve as an important guide, the goals of a chief executive officer (CEO) take precedence over the strategic plan. Essentially, higher education CEO's are not bound to follow the strategic plan as a script for the primary initiatives pursued in most cases.

### *Resource Stewardship*

Among several questions, this dissertation is interested in the use of strategic plans to guide the allocation of resources at public land-grant institutions. The interest is based on the variability in State-support among public institutions where a number of factors influence State-support of public institutions.

According to the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association report (2018), there is considerable variation in funding across individual States. This variation primarily occurs in the educational appropriations per full-time equivalent (EAFTE) student, which is a measure of state and local support available for public higher education operating expenses. Since 2013, 34 States have seen an increase in EAFTE while 16 states have experienced a decrease. Some States demonstrated recession conditions originating in 2008 and until very recently continued to display recession conditions. While most States have increased funding for their respective public higher education institutions, some still continue to provide less funding than before the 2008 recession.

Numerous scholarly articles and public reports are available on the topic of variable and long-term decreases in State-support of public higher education institutions, however, deep exploration is outside the scope of this publication. The purpose of raising this trend is to highlight the influence of “resource stewardship” as a critical topic found in both strategic plan documents and the strategic planning purpose and process, which will be explored in greater detail in the following sections. In every interview, the concern of responsible stewardship of scarce State resources was prevalent.

At Grand State University, an executive leader responsible for strategic planning, highlighted operational excellence in the strategic plan as an important factor to illustrating resource stewardship:

One pillar of our strategic plan is called “operational excellence and resource stewardship.” We have large numbers here with an overall budget of more than \$7 billion. When we advocate for resources, we have to make the case. The core of our message is to say “we [as a University] are trying to become as efficient as possible and here are ways that we have reduced costs.” The legislature wants us to show that every dollar is wisely used so that it will resonate well with public officials and show them that there is not administrative bloat, which will help us in receiving future funding.

In like fashion, Shining Tower University (STU) connected their affordability program to freezing tuition as part of their resource stewardship commitment highlighted in their marketing-centric non-traditional strategic plan. STU published a comparison of peer universities illustrating an upward trend in their tuition rates and a flat rate at STU for the past 6 years. The STU Vice President for Development, whose responsibility is to either manage fundraising or government relations, highlighted the importance of endowments for specific Colleges to reduce dependence on state appropriations:

One of our colleges had a donor that made a significant commitment to the college. They just said at that time, to “use it for your priorities.” Since then, the endowment has grown significantly. By having this flexibility and having those external resources, that College has been able to utilize these [more effectively] as compared to other colleges who don’t have such an endowment. If a college has to rely on student fees or State appropriations, those things are variable and depend on enrollment. The longevity of programs from the strategic plan are at risk, but by having an endowment, you can think about things differently.

Open Book University published an illustrative map of each State in the United States that displays the percentage increase in State appropriations over a ten-year period. This is a component of the strategic plan website in the “building value” section

that is intended to highlight how their specific institution had received among the lowest State appropriations as compared to other States. A subsequent illustration displayed a summary of revenue and expenditures by category and savings from specific initiatives on the University website.

During the course of the interviews, it was clear that each institution held an expectation to be efficient resource stewards of State funds. However, the purpose of resource stewardship was unique at Big State University (BSU). As shown in the institutional strategic plan and as discussed during the interview process, the focus of resource stewardship was not intended to attract more donors, rather, it was intended to serve as an accountability mechanism to students. The underlying cultural imperative was not necessarily to compete with other institutions based on low tuition rates or to achieve advantage over other institutions when seeking funding. The theme was intended to support the university culture of transparency and fulfillment of social justice along with public service through a direct example of how the university itself was fulfilling this obligation by highlighting what they stood for. The BSU executive responsible for government relations offering the following statement:

One of the things that have become apparent to me with the disinvestment of States in higher education, is that Universities continue to grow and find other forms of revenue, but all of those other forms of revenue, such as research grants, etc., are all very competitive with other Universities. In the good old days, each State took care of their Universities and so higher education never built up muscles to go after competitive dollars. It's very important for Universities to announce to the world what they stand for.

Each institution highlighted the importance of resource stewardship. Table 5.2 provides an outline of each specific strategic plan phrase associated with research

stewardship, the number of supporting goals, and the number of measures found for the goals.

**Table 5.2 Comparison of Resource Stewardship Statements**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Strategic Plan Phrase</b>	<b>Supporting Goals</b>	<b>Number of Measures</b>
Grand State University	Operational Excellence and Resource Stewardship	5	5
Big State University	Accountability and Transparency	2	0
Shining Tower University	Affordability & Accessibility	3	1
Open Book University	Building Value	3	3
Public Good University	Resource Stewardship	6	1
Morrill Act University	Organizational Processes	3	1

*Teaching and Learning*

In every conversation, and on every strategic plan website, the topic of teaching and learning through some form of published phrase is evident. Further, this component is considered as a fundamental theme, strategic goal, or chief executive officer initiative in every case. Goals include references to student learning outcomes, educational experiences, student workforce readiness, scholarship, pedagogical practices for faculty, faculty teaching resources, hiring of exemplary faculty, curriculum development, and numerous other references in the domain of teaching and learning.

It is no mistake that teaching and learning is mentioned repeatedly among participants as it is near the core of the public land-grant mission and has been the center

of various debate between faculty and administrators since American higher education began. Modern missions are commonly based on the triad of teaching, research, and public service with certain institutions adding supplemental aims that augment these missions. As a result, all institutions clearly referenced this core mission component in their strategic plan and within the interviews.

The Grand State University (GSU) executive leader responsible for strategic planning stated, “one of our focuses is improving teaching and learning. We tell legislators that we have made an impact through the large number of students graduating last year and this helps us prove the value of our State as an investment.”

An institutional strategic planning participant and a College Dean at Open Book University, noted that during the strategic planning process they looked closely at the teaching and learning mission especially as it was connected to facilities planning.

For a specific College, we looked at facilities tied to the student experience and looked at how to deliver a teaching and learning environment to provide the best student experience that we could. Our fundraising was tied to the strategic plan with this specific item, we got the money, and built the building.

Public Good University highlighted several initiatives that would improve the educational experience of students through the incorporation of innovative classroom environments and active learning. This was coupled with building innovative graduate degrees and creating lifelong student experiences.

Morrill Act University incorporated discussion of curriculum with multiple modes of delivery, online learning, and digital learning options. Extensive discussion and goals cover the need to empower faculty and partner with pre-college educators. The strategic planning program also includes a community forum intended to raise

awareness for the teaching and learning goals of the strategic plan as well as to highlight progress toward implementation.

Big State University has a distinct focus on the student experience as part of their effort to develop “lifelong citizens who will serve the community, State, Nation, and World.” Their plan highlights the importance of creating opportunities for students to explore inquiry, discovery, and creative expression through their learning experiences.

Shining Tower University is unique in its marketing-centric approach to teaching and learning goals. The strategic plan highlights the value of tuition dollars per credit hour, short degree program lengths, post-graduation job placement, promotion of year-round enrollment, and international experiences. Table 5.3 outlines each specific strategic plan phrase associated with research stewardship, the number of supporting goals, and the number of measures found for the goals.

**Table 5.3 Comparison of Teaching and Learning Statements**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Strategic Plan Phrase</b>	<b>Supporting Goals</b>	<b>Number of Measures</b>
Grand State University	Teaching and Learning	4	4
Big State University	Empowering Engaged Thinkers	6	0
Shining Tower University	Transformative Education	5	2
Open Book University	Teaching and Learning	2	1
Public Good University	Educational Experience	6	1
Morrill Act University	Transforming Education	4	1

### *Research Ambition*

In every case, research-related ambitions were listed as a core priority in their strategic plans. In some cases, the research mission was tied to the public service mission. Specific institutions with academic medical components published clinical research-related goals. It was clear that research was central to both the mission and important for generating revenue among the universities.

According to Brint (2005), American research universities are experiencing a period of profound change as they become more attuned to market forces as they re-engineer themselves to become more efficient, while investing more in areas that attract private research support. Reflecting their land-grant origins, public universities adopting the “interdisciplinary” strategy are particularly drawn to projects that serve the economic development of their respective States. Individual colleges then focus on their specific research niche and engage with a variety of constituents for support.

This was certainly true for the Dean and executive leader responsible for leading the development of a unit-level strategic plan at Grand State University:

At the college and unit level, strategic plans are used to demonstrate their distinct competitive advantage in the marketplace. We really want to distinguish ourselves at the college level. For example, if we do a strategic plan in engineering and one of our focus areas emerges in medical engineering with cancer research, etc., if that is a focus area, then that is where we invest. So, we become very intentional to grow our faculty and research capability in that area and this gives us a distinct competitive advantage.

Similarly, at Open Book University (OBU), the focus toward Research in the unit-level strategic plan was also true. The OBU executive leader responsible for strategic planning stated:

At the College level, the Colleges identify how faculty might meet a certain research niche that they are trying to expand and how new faculty might meet goals for retention. The colleges are very good about framing what they are asking for. This becomes the alignment piece for what is being asked for in the budget and their focus area.

The OBU website highlighted an impressive number of patents issued and the number of publications by researchers in conjunction with the total amount of research and development funding sources. Their website also contained links to specific research programs and publications highlighting accomplishments.

Shining Tower University placed a large focus on “world-changing research” and incorporated their academic medical component with technology commercialization and pharmaceutical discovery. Their marketing-centric website highlighted extensive accomplishments in the form of awarded research grants, partnerships with pharmaceutical companies, investments into data science and artificial intelligence, expected funding for research facilities, and an exhaustive list of agricultural breakthroughs and their impact on society. The website certainly gave the impression of great accomplishment and capability in the domain of research expertise.

Table 5.4 explores the references to research in the strategic plans of each institution. With the exception of Big State University, each strategic plan website contained references to research accomplishments and the institutions focus on delivering research.

**Table 5.4 Comparison of Research-Related Statements**

<b>Institution</b>	<b>Strategic Plan Phrase</b>	<b>Supporting Goals</b>	<b>Number of Measures</b>
Grand State University	Research and Creative Expression	3	3
Big State University	Innovative Solutions to Society's Great Challenges	8	0
Shining Tower University	World-Changing Research	4	2
Open Book University	Advancing Innovation and Excellence	3	3
Public Good University	Research and Scholarship	5	0
Morrill Act University	Discovery	3	1