

**DRAFT 2**

## *INTEGRATED PLANNING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH*

### **A Framework for *Making Choices***

Guelph's position as a leading university is the direct result of careful academic planning. A fine example of this success is the strategic, multi-year effort mounted to respond to the double cohort—an effort which has drawn praise both from within and outside the university sector. We should definitely congratulate ourselves on this performance. But unfortunately, it is not yet time to relax.

As the President has pointed out, we continue to face issues that could prove as challenging in their own way as the double cohort. This is the time to build upon our accomplishments and transform our planning process from one that is merely successful into one that is truly exceptional. The future holds both predictable trends and uncertain commitments. We have done a good job so far in planning our strategy for and response to these developments. As we move forward, we need to do even better, and we need to do so more consistently.

We are not alone in this desire. Many other universities as well as other types of organizations have been recently attempting to improve the coordination and comprehensiveness of their strategic planning efforts. *Integrated planning* is the name generally given to new approaches which emphasize transparency, predictability, accountability, and effectiveness in the planning process. This document is intended to open discussion on what such a process might look like at Guelph.

### **Integrated Planning: Strategy**

The introduction of integrated planning at the University of Guelph has the advantage of a fairly well-developed existing planning process. The word 'integrated' has a number of connotations here: most important is that moving to this new planning process does not involve discarding and replacing our current processes, but rather building upon them and more explicitly co-ordinating them into a collaborative and systematic framework which facilitates and encourages better

planning at all levels. There are several key dimensions of integration that we hope to achieve, each of which represents a basic goal of the process:

- Integrating whole-university and specific-unit planning efforts in a coordinated process that allows strategic decision-making to inform and be informed by the particular goals and needs of individual units.
  - *Goal: systematize distributed planning efforts into a well-defined, repeatable procedure.*
- Integrating planning with resource allocation in a more formal way that acknowledges the increasing uncertainty of our primary funding sources, recognizes the need for resource planning, and forestalls the emergence of both unfundable plans and unplanned deficits.
  - *Goal: ensure a match between resource allocations and objectives.*
- Integrating academic and administrative planning, in explicit recognition that effective coordinated execution and delivery in both realms requires that same sort of coordination at the front end.
  - *Goal: ensure that administrative structures are necessary and sufficient to support the academic enterprise.*
- Integration of planning, evaluation, and accountability, to provide more precise and transparent feedback on performance in all areas of endeavour, and to allow plans to reflect accomplishment and encompass efforts toward continuous improvement.
  - *Goal: enhance accountability by measuring and reporting tangible progress and results.*
- Integration of plans over a multi-year time frame, to improve continuity and predictability, and to reduce our dependence on and exposure to short-term fluctuations and constraints.
  - *Goal: focus on longer-term forecasts and effects.*

Our overall goal should be a clear, efficient, and repeatable planning process at all levels, because the challenges those plans are meant to address will only become more daunting. Integrated planning—as a process and an organizational project—is a way to further enhance the ability of the University to confront and control its future.

Integrated planning is not, however, an end in itself, but rather a methodology for more effectively marshalling the University’s ever-limited resources toward common goals. The specific themes and parameters that must guide the planning process have been outlined by the President in “Making Choices.” That document reaffirms the University’s core mission, its fundamental values, and the strategic directions that we want to emphasize as a world-renowned academic institution. This document will describe the process we propose for making plans that serve that mission, uphold those values, and take us in those directions.

A better-organized plan will of course help us respond in a rational and equitable way to potential funding shortfalls and permit the required flexibility to identify strategic possibilities for investment and retrenchment—and at the same time making preparations to adapt to both positive and negative financial situations.

### *Integrating all levels of planning*

Like all universities, Guelph is a complex organization—deliberately elaborate in structure and intra-institutional relationships, and full of exceptional units, programs, institutes, centres, campuses, projects, initiatives, and subgroups with varying levels of autonomy and often diffuse relationships with one another and the administrative ‘centre’. This organization serves, or at least reflects, academic roles and requirements, and is not to be sacrificed merely for administrative simplicity. But it does present a challenge to coordinating the efforts of such a diverse institutional ecology.

Dispersed planning efforts, conducted in relative isolation, may succeed in focusing on local strengths and weaknesses, but they often fail to account for existing or potential interconnections with other parts of the university, each with their own idiosyncratic strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. Plans generated through a variety of different processes and merely aggregated at the centre yield varying and often incommensurate levels of confidence and commitment, may be based on incompatible assumptions, and can lead to friction and the perception of “different rules for different schools.”

Integrated planning establishes a framework into which planning at all levels fits, as well as a process that sets standards for how planning is done and what sort of outputs are expected from a planning process. It defines a planning method which opens up efforts to critical scrutiny and reliable assessment. Both centre and periphery gain from enhanced clarity and predictability in the planning process: the centre can more accurately gauge university requirements and better align them with the resources it distributes and administers; individual units gain firmer commitments (because they are made by a more-informed centre), fairer appropriations (since they are made through a more transparent process), and better information about their own performance and improvement, including clearer criteria for review.

### *Integrating planning and budgeting*

Plans specify what you want; budgets describe what you can afford. Even in the best of times, the ideal plan is likely to exceed the budget and so be subject to some sort of trimming. In the worst case, the plan is so diffuse that its true budgetary implications cannot be discerned, and funding decisions become almost arbitrary. In times of cutbacks and unpleasant fiscal realities, the need for tight budgetary discipline can overwhelm creative planning and lead to purely reactive, stopgap-oriented plans: the focus of planning becomes the protection of ‘vital organs’ from the budget knife, not the careful prioritization of limited resources.

Integrated planning specifically puts budgeting in service to planning, by demanding from the planning process the sort of rigorous resource analysis required to do accurate budgeting. We resist the temptation of allowing budget constraints to drive planning by ensuring that planning outputs are sufficient to drive budget decisions. So even in times of relative expansion, we may make cutbacks, and vice-versa. A key here is maintaining a longer, multi-year view of planning, so that short-term fluctuations in resources can be absorbed and accounted for without derailing longer-term goals.

We also need to recognize that operating funds are only one component of the institution’s overall budget. Plans affect and are constrained by the capital budget, and other non-financial resources such as the inventory of physical space. Capital expenditures and allocations of real estate represent very long-term commitments that require a corresponding level of care and clear

justification. When we construct, renovate, or repurpose a building, we need to identify precisely how it serves the academic mission of the University, and why it is better than alternative capital investments. Integrated planning is intended to provide this context.

Some units have access to additional sources of fund-raising beyond the normal operating budget. Part of integrated planning for such units is the alignment of plans and base funding with possibilities and priorities for development of these additional funding sources. We don't want to chase money for its own sake, but it would be irresponsible not to apply some level of optimization to our strategies for making the most of potential funding opportunities.

### *Integrating academic and administrative planning*

Academic planning is rightly the key focus of planning efforts at the University—we are an academic institution with an academic mission, and our administrative structures exist to facilitate and enable that mission. But there is always a tendency in the university environment to view administration as non-productive overhead, and give short shrift to administrative planning. We often expend the requisite effort to devise solid academic plans, and then leave the administrative details to sort themselves out, as an “exercise for the reader.” But how can those academic plans succeed—or be considered well-founded—when the support and administrative services vital to their successful execution are poorly defined and planned only incidentally? The lack of administrative capacity can be just as much of a brake on academic success as budgetary restrictions.

An integrated planning process will help link academic planning to the administrative planning that necessarily supports it. Few academic investments do not entail corresponding administrative needs, and administrative milestones underlie all important academic achievements—these links need to be explicit rather than emergent. And even in the absence of expansion or contraction, there is anecdotal evidence of administrative over- and under-load in various units across campus: such imbalances need to be more carefully assessed and brought in line with academic priorities. Planning for staff resources requires at least the same level of scrutiny and rigour that we apply to academic decisions.

### *Integrating evaluation and accountability*

In current planning efforts, we have readily acknowledged the obligation to identify performance indicators. We have been particularly adept in publishing such indicators to external consumers such as the government and prospective students. However, we have largely avoided applying these metrics internally, where they are most useful. We need to establish procedures to make measures of performance meaningful by applying them in a formal manner to evaluate achievements relative to plans. This not only provides us with a better sense of our progress, but also encourages the development of better, more accurate, and more informative indicators.

When plans fail to be realized, we want to be able to identify the reasons why—ideally in order to learn from mistakes. Similarly, successful planning needs to be recognized and its characteristics propagated. Making units more accountable to their plans encourages more careful planning as well as more conscientious execution. And the sword of accountability cuts both ways: it also protects individual units from contingent failures in the plans upon which they are dependent, and disruptions in their inputs. No unit—and thus no unit's plan—stands alone, without dependencies on other units. Clarified performance measures and accountability

standards allow us to detect, and ideally correct, cascading problems before too many dominoes topple.

### *Integrating long-term planning*

The types of enhanced planning discipline described above all lead us to taking a more comprehensive and extended approach to planning. We propose a five-year period as the planning horizon. In particular, a longer-term emphasis is important to maintain a consistent approach toward budget management, personnel resourcing, and evaluation. The ultimate metric for all plans—contribution to the university’s mission—is an inherently long-term goal; individual component plans of the overall integrated plan need to take a similarly long-term view. Year-by-year plans simply cannot capture the necessary depth. Worse, they foster a reactive mode of operation that leads to temporary patches instead of permanent solutions.

Problems and challenges can be acute or chronic. The latter cannot even begin to be addressed without long-term planning and while short-cycle plans may be able to mitigate against the former, embedding our tactical response to flare-ups and eruptions within the context of a long-term strategy will produce better, more lasting solutions. Longer-term plans also afford the planners enough time to plan more accurately and reliably, and to complete, consult on, and validate their plans before facing the challenges of execution.

### *Integrating with current and ongoing planning*

Engaging in integrated planning does not mean the addition of yet another layer of administrative bureaucracy. Rather it is a reformulation and reorganization of the planning activity that is largely already routine to most parts of the university. In some cases it involves extending planning requirements imposed by external agencies to harmonize with internal needs. We already have organizational structures in place to coordinate planning efforts—integrated planning will not replace or replicate these units, but rather leverage them, and empower them to manage the new integrated process. In one sense, the introduction of integrated planning will not represent a significant dislocation: units will still continue to plan their activities as they do now. The difference is more in the emphasis and focus of that planning, as the various dimensions of integration are introduced.

## **Integrated Planning: Process**

The ultimate goal of an integrated planning process is a comprehensive, university-level document that sets out what every unit of the university intends to achieve over a five-year period. There will thus be an actual, identifiable big-*P* Plan, which represents a shared formal commitment by the whole university community, and stands as a benchmark against which progress can be measured.

The Plan will not be carved in stone—the intent is not to create an inflexible and confining structure for its own sake—but modifications will need to be well-justified. The objective is to devise a plan that is both ambitious and achievable. In response to unforeseen events, course corrections will be considered carefully and applied as required. Planning for the succeeding period will begin in the third year, thus allowing for two years to complete and confirm each five-year plan.

Effective planning is in some sense its own reward: the intended outcome is a better sense of purpose, progress, and performance which makes everyone's job easier. Moreover, the integrated planning process, by explicitly acknowledging and emphasizing inter-unit dependencies and relationships, encourages collaborative efforts among departments, colleges, and administrative units at all levels. By promoting a shared vision of the future and innovative, interdisciplinary solutions to communal problems, integrated planning encourages cooperation among units, and strengthens the ties that bind the university community together. This is not to say that the final outcome of integrated planning will satisfy everyone; sacrifices will certainly be required at times. But in the context of a mutual integrated approach to planning, such disappointments will be more palatable in that they arise from transparent, justified, and fair decisions.

### *Academic planning in practice*

Thus far, the key concept of 'plan' has been left undefined. Ultimately, a plan is a statement of a unit's direction; a map indicating where the unit is in its field, where it wants and needs to go over the planning period, and the optimum path to be taken on the way there. The plan consists of both goals—what we want to do—and strategies—how we intend to do it. The plan identifies priorities and makes choices about the whole scope and potential scope of a unit's activities.

Some of the more detailed elements of a plan are more directly applicable to academic units than administrative and operational ones. And admittedly, despite the commitment to integrate academic and administrative planning, it is simpler to use the language of academic planning to describe the process, but equivalencies are easily identified. For example, where an academic department may take as a goal some definable level of research leadership within its discipline, an administrative unit would be more likely to establish metrics that quantify the use of best practices and delivery criteria.

The new integrated planning process will need a mechanism for expressing individual plans and plan components in a consistent manner, so as to facilitate comparison, assessment, and of course integration. *Planning guidelines* will be developed to serve as a framework for detailing plans and priorities at each level. (A draft set of key elements for the planning guidelines can be found in Appendix I) The guidelines will extend a mechanism already in successful use in the Internal Review process, and which arose from the Provincial mandate to perform regular internal reviews of undergraduate programs.

The development of planning framework (both the guidelines and timelines) are an important first step in the transition to integrated planning. Initially, these will build upon the models that are already in use, expanding them to address graduate and research activities as well. The details and documentation required for integrated planning is essentially a superset of that needed for a number of similar purposes, including SCIR undergraduate review, OCGS review, external accreditation, and other forms of assessment. If we ensure that new framework can also address the needs of these processes, we can avoid replicating effort, and reduce the overall burden on those responsible for planning—Chairs and equivalent front-line administrators especially. This new framework can build upon existing documentation generated for internal or external reviews and assessments. Then the completed integrated planning exercise will provide a 'head start' on future review processes, which in turn feed input into the next planning cycle, and so on.

A key component of the planning framework will be the elaboration of the current “self-study” into a more comprehensive self-assessment, which looks deeper into the details of a unit’s goals, and farther out into the future of its opportunities and challenges. The five-year perspective of the integrated planning process demands that units ask themselves more probing and realistic questions about the future of their disciplines and the continued viability of their organizational status quo. Our existing processes already take into account many of the dimensions of integration: for example, internal reviews require departments to assess their academic directions against their physical space needs. These linkages will be further emphasized where necessary.

Because the current set of reviews are currently focused on assessments of specific academic components—undergraduate, graduate, or research—they tend to put that one facet in the foreground and relegate the others to a cursory background outline. Internal reviews ask departments to critique their undergraduate programs in detail, and then only briefly ensure that graduate offerings and research programs are appropriately aligned. The integrated planning process will consider each of these components in parallel, identifying the dependencies and mutual coherence of all three facets of academic activity together.

In order to contribute reliable information to the University’s overall integrated plan, each unit must ask itself some important questions. Moreover, it must devise answers which are—to the best of its ability—realistic, candid, and where possible, amenable to measurement. What follows is not an exhaustive list, and final guidelines will indicate the full range of questions and expected information. It should be noted that the more self-inquisitive and self-critical a unit is willing to be, the easier it will find the planning process. Many of the questions identified or implied below are matters of interpretation. Data and objective measurements need to be supplied to back up the self-study conclusions, and benchmarks should be proposed to evaluate progress.

Ultimately this new planning process is not intended to be an imposed, unvarying format for unit plans, but a more flexible means of ensuring a common level of self-examination.

### *Timelines*

Moving from distributed, short-term planning to fully integrated planning is not something that can happen instantaneously. The goal is to use the coming academic year (2005/06) to develop the concrete and transition into the new process, so that our first, full five-year plan would cover the academic years 2006/07 through 2010/11. In order to meet this target, we will need to establish target dates for the following milestones:

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| <b>May 2005 – August 2005</b> | Consultation with Deans to finalize the planning process – timelines, guidelines and data requirements.   |
| <b>August 2005</b>            | <p><b>VPAC Annual Planning Meeting: Part I</b><br/>Final planning guidelines distributed. They will include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• draft, high-level multi-year resource allocations for each college</li> <li>• details of the University Priority Investment Fund to be used for specific re-investments</li> </ul> |

**Preliminary RPA data package released.**

Draft elements of the data package can be found in Appendix II

**September – November 2005**     **Development of the Unit and College Level Academic Plans**

Units will complete their plans through normal internal consultative processes involving staff, students, and faculty. Units are encouraged to make contact with and seek the participation and advice of other units on which they depend or to which they provide services.

Completed plans of academic units will be submitted to College or designated Deans. The Deans will then begin to integrate department and unit plans with whole-College objectives into a comprehensive College-level plan. This will undoubtedly involve iterated feedback to individual units, and choices about strategic reallocation of resources among units within the Colleges: priorities and emphases exist and need to be expressed at the College as well as the unit level.

**December 2005**

**VPAC Annual Planning Meeting: Part II**

Deans will present their College level plans. The Plans will be discussed and an Academic & Resource Allocation plan will be developed where all requests for additional funding will be prioritized.

**January – February 2006**

**Development of University Plan**

The Provost will present and defend the Academic Plan through the formal budget planning meetings with SCUP and the Planning Steering Committee (PSC).

The PSC then begins the process of matching the plan to operative budget constraints, reconciling conflicts, and recognizing opportunities for organizational synergy. While the PSC is clearly a place to resolve lingering mismatches between academic and administrative plans, the intent is for such coordination to take place as much as possible during the development of plans at local levels. PSC will then take a key role in establishing budget priorities.

Additional consultation with individual Deans and VPAC

**March – April 2006**

**Approval of the Preliminary Budget**

University budget to be developed for Approval for the Board. Discussion in Board/Senate Committees  
Approval of Budget.

**August 2006**

**Beginning of Year 2 Planning Process.**

VPAC Annual Planning Meeting: Part I

Year 2 Planning Guidelines to be released  
Revised Year 2 data package released

The Office of Resource Planning and Analysis (RPA) will continue to provide support to units (and Deans and Dean-equivalents) in preparing initial plans during this period.

## Integrated Planning: Evaluation

Thus far, we have described primarily the inputs to an integrated plan. What remains is the outputs. In addition to gaining a better sense of what we are going to do, integrated planning is specifically intended to give us more information about what we did, and especially how well we did it. There are two primary thrusts to this emphasis on evaluation:

- Performance Indicators: objective measures of achievement identified in the planning process and used to establish well-defined objectives.
- Peer Comparisons: benchmark comparisons of Guelph with an appropriate set of ‘competing’ institutions.

Combining these two forms of evaluation gives us not just a sense of internal strengths and weaknesses, but also a context in which to prioritize areas for improvement. Peer comparisons represent a more rigorous formalization of the “we’re number 1” approach to the Maclean’s survey. In particular, we expect to conduct peer comparisons in a more flexible manner, recognizing that the most relevant peer institutions may vary from discipline to discipline and unit to unit.

As noted above, we have extensive experience in identifying performance indicators, but relatively undeveloped capacity in actually applying them and holding units accountable for stated goals. Appropriate metrics will also vary from unit to unit, and may be either quantitative or qualitative. In some cases, annual measurements will suffice—in others, a moving average over multiple years will be more fair and informative. The goal is to use the indicators that offer the best and most useful feedback for real improvement of performance, not just those that are the easiest to implement.

Because the selection of performance indicators is itself part of the negotiated planning process, units will have an important but non-exclusive say in how they are assessed. A core set of indicators will be developed for all units. (A draft list of indicators can be found in Appendix III) However, there be other indicators that represent the shared vision for individual units. But this means that units will need to carefully select appropriate indicators and not just report numbers for their own sake.

This integrated planning process is not solely about ends and measurement—we believe that the exercise of this means of planning will in itself help clarify objectives and lead to better overall execution of the academic mission. But operationalizing accountability and establishing rigorous assessment criteria are key goals, and there should be no illusions about the consequences that will flow from unjustified deviations. Integrated plans are not just aspirational statements, or the academic equivalent of campaign promises, but rather form a matrix of clear, firm and therefore

mutually supporting commitments made by and for the various components of the University in order to maximize our collective potential and extend our success to new heights.

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