

2015 SCUP FELLOWS PROGRAM

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PROJECT ESSAY

1. Project Description

The American Association of University Professors' 1967 Joint Statement on Government of Colleges and Universities¹ identifies planning as one of the "most important aspects of institutional responsibility." It further states that "Effective planning demands that the broadest possible exchange of information and opinion should be the rule for communication among the components of a college or university." However, as Robert Birnbaum observes in *How Colleges Work*, the Joint Statement "is less than successful in identifying the specific structures and processes that would implement these principles."² Many institutions subscribe to the ideals put forward in the Joint Statement, but campus leaders frequently struggle in strategic planning to combine a meaningful commitment to the process of shared governance with the need to drive necessary organizational change.

The University of Mississippi is committed to the norm of shared governance, and in 2009, it assembled a Strategic Planning Council to create the UM 2020 strategic plan. The council is made up of representatives from the faculty, administration, and support units around campus. As the university's Manager of Strategic Planning, my project as a 2015 SCUP Fellow would be to explore the best practices universities use, within a context of shared governance, to create, implement, and assess strategic plans. Specifically, I plan to create case studies that examine the factors which key participants, particularly faculty members, perceive to be important for effective strategic planning. I hope to gain a more thorough understanding of the available best practices that I could apply to my work. I would seek the guidance of SCUP's members in planning and establishing partnerships for my project. By examining the question of shared governance in detail, this study should add to the set of best practices to improve the effectiveness of strategic planning.

2. Project Goal

The goal of the project is to answer the following research questions:

- How do institutions organize themselves for strategic planning in a shared governance environment?
- What are the factors that make for an effective strategic planning process?
- What resources do effective strategic planning committees have and use?

3. Methodology

Case study method and rationale

- Interviews with faculty members and other campus leaders
- Review of planning and related documents
- Data collection on committee resources

¹ <http://www.aaup.org/report/statement-government-colleges-and-universities>

² Birnbaum, Robert. *How Colleges Work*. Jossey-Bass Higher Education Series, 1988, p 8.

The best approach for this project is a qualitative case study methodology because my aim is to understand the roles, perceptions, and attitudes of people in complex environments. I have experience with qualitative methods from my doctoral studies at Vanderbilt University and in my work at the University of Mississippi. I will design rigorous interview and document review protocols and follow my institution's review board's (IRB) guidelines.

Sample and rationale

- Public institutions drawn from Southeastern Conference (SEC) peers

UM frequently uses Southeastern Conference (SEC) institutions for comparisons. My plan will be to recruit at least 4 institutions from among the public universities in this group. These SEC institutions have comparable sizes and missions which will allow for generalizing to other public universities. It will also be feasible for me to travel to some of these institutions for in-person data collection.

4. Deliverables

- A research paper on the methodology and findings of the project presented in the context of the relevant literature and prepared for journal submission
- A presentation based on findings for the SCUP conference and other venues (Southern Association of Institutional Researchers and the Association for the Study of Higher Education)
- A guide to best practices for strategic planning that could be published as an op-ed for an outlet such as *Planning for Higher Education* or the *Chronicle of Higher Education*

5. Implementation Plan and Preliminary Schedule

March – May 2015

- Research and draft literature review
- Develop interview and document review protocol
- Secure IRB approval
- Recruit participants

June– November 2015

- Data collection through site visits, telephone interviews, and document review
- Transcribe and prep data for analysis

December 2015 – February 2016

- Analyze data
- Draft research paper

March – July 2016

- Prepare and deliver presentation for SCUP
- Write best practices op-ed

6. Outcome

This project would benefit the field of higher education planning by adding important insights about shared governance to the set of best practices. It would benefit me and my institution, the University of Mississippi, by providing guidance on ways to make its Strategic Planning Council more effective.