

Departmental Strategic Planning Template

What is strategic planning and why?

Strategic planning is about shaping our future rather than simply drifting or reacting to it. It involves a careful look at our context, current performance, capabilities and limitations, goals, and constraints. It then envisions an attainable future and identifies the steps needed to achieve it.

Strategic planning is most effective when all members of a department participate in the process and, at its conclusion, feel a strong sense of ownership of the envisioned future and the plans to get there. It can help faculty members move from thinking in terms of “my course” and “my career” to “our program” and “our mission.” The template presented here can help you organize your thoughts and present your plan to your dean and the provost. If you have a different template you find more helpful, feel free to use it. There’s also a suggested process you may want to follow.

Departmental strategic planning is part of a dialogue between the college (via its agents – the deans and provost) and the department. Once a department has completed its plan, the deans will provide feedback and may suggest changes. Thus departments should see their strategic plan as tentative until a final version has been written and both the department and the deans approve.

1. Context

Higher education and the broader culture

There are many trends in higher education and our broader culture today. Among these are:

- increased consumerism on the part of students,
- increased interdisciplinary teaching and scholarship,
- globalization,
- increased demands for accountability by political leaders and accrediting agencies,
- the learner-centered education movement,
- an emphasis on multi-culturalism,
- the movement toward constructivism as a philosophy of education,
- increased use of technology in education, and
- increased student demand for more interactive teaching styles.

Do these trends affect your department? If so, how?

Are there other such trends that affect you? What are they and how do they affect you?

Your discipline

Disciplines have characteristics that affect our emphasis in both pedagogy and scholarship.

What are the key trends in your discipline today?

How do they affect your department?

Are there national enrollment trends in your discipline that may affect your planning?

What vocations do your graduates pursue immediately after graduation and later? How does this shape your curriculum and advising? Include any data you have on this in the appendices.

Aspects of Calvin that shape your department

Being at Calvin College shapes departments in ways that a department at another college or university would not be shaped.

How does the emphasis on integration of faith and learning affect your pedagogy, scholarship, and service?

How have Calvin's Student Learning Outcomes affected your curriculum or pedagogy?

How does the college's strategic plan impact your department's plan?

Unique features of your department

Departments often have unique features that shape them in important ways. Among these are the department's history, their physical location on campus, and the particular gifts and training of their faculty members.

What unique features contribute to shaping your department? In what ways?

2. Mission

Summarize your department's mission. We're not looking for the sort of 20-words-or-less mission statement one often sees in businesses or social service agencies. Rather write a brief statement of what your department aims to accomplish in each of the following areas.

Each major you offer

What majors do you offer? If you have a statement of student learning objectives for your majors that you think addresses your mission with students in these majors, simply include it in the appendices and reference it.

Service courses

If you offer courses designed to meet cognate requirements for other majors, what are your goals for students in those courses? Have the departments you are serving read those goals and approved them? (Be sure these goals are assessable.)

Core courses

If you offer core courses, what are your goals for students in those courses? (Be sure these goals are assessable as well.)

Scholarship

Attach a copy of your department's statement of scholarship in the appendices. If you don't have one or your statement hasn't been updated and reviewed by the department within the past five years, be sure to do so.

Does this statement adequately address your mission in scholarship?

Community service

Many faculty members use their scholarly expertise to serve both the Calvin community and communities outside of Calvin. For example, some faculty members have written articles that use their scholarly knowledge to address particular needs. Others have assisted schools or agencies overseas. Does your department see itself as having a mission in this area? If so, what is it?

3. The current state of your department

In the appendices, report data summarizing the state of your department. Retrospective data should look back five years; projections should look forward five years. Many of these data are available from the department chairs' web site. Essential reports are:

Programs and curriculum

- all of your course offerings and their enrollments,
- numbers of students enrolled in each of your majors and minors,
- number of graduates in each major and minor,
- the status of your teacher education program
- special offerings (off-campus programs, internships, etc.) and enrollment,
- your engagement with all-college programs – core, FEN, DCM, CCE, the writing program.

Student Learning

- your student learning outcomes for each major and minor,
- assessment data on how students are doing in achieving these objectives,
- any plans you have for attaining further such data.

Personnel

- a list of faculty and their teaching load assignments,
- faculty development cycles including dates for any promotion or tenure decisions and evaluation schedules,
- a staff projection including information you have on plans for sabbaticals, leaves of absence, load reductions funded by research grants, etc.,
- a breakdown of numbers of faculty and students by gender and majority/minority status,
- anticipated needs for new faculty,
- a list of faculty areas of expertise.

Budget and facilities

- your budgeted and actual expenditures,
- a list of your facilities and equipment and any needs you anticipate.

Summarize any trends you see in these data, particularly any that are likely to have an impact on staffing or course offerings in your department in the next five years. Are there any areas of disciplinary or interdisciplinary expertise for which your department does not have adequate staff?

Who in your department has taken a particular scholarly interest in Christian perspectives on your discipline? Is this adequate coverage? Too much?

4. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats

Do a SWOT analysis of your department. Opportunities and threats typically arise from the context; strengths and weaknesses from the resources (or lack) within your department.

What new opportunities do you foresee in the next few years?

What are the main obstacles you face in responding to them?

What do assessment data tell you about your strengths and weaknesses?

Once you have identified your strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, filling in the following matrix should help you clarify some of your future directions.

	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Weaknesses</i>
<i>Opportunities</i>	<i>Opportunities:</i> <i>Strengths:</i> <i>Strategies:</i>	<i>Opportunities:</i> <i>Weaknesses:</i> <i>Strategies:</i>
<i>Threats</i>	<i>Threats:</i> <i>Strengths:</i> <i>Strategies:</i>	<i>Threats:</i> <i>Weaknesses:</i> <i>Strategies:</i>

5. Vision for five years from now

Write a description of where you would like your department to be five years from now.

Comment on student learning (major, service, core), assessment, curriculum, enrollment, facilities, staff, scholarship, integration of faith & learning, and service plus any other features you think are important for your department. Consider the financial implications of your goals.

Be sure to incorporate the strategies that you developed in completing the SWOT analysis matrix.

6. Next steps

List specific goals that your department needs to accomplish to bring about your envisioned future. Be as concrete as possible; with each goal include target dates for completion and what individual or body is responsible for completing it.

Date approved by department _____

Date approved by dean _____

Some comments on process:

1. The first three steps – context, mission, and data – can be worked on in parallel by separate ad hoc committees if your department is large enough. Most of the data can be collected by a departmental administrative assistant with the help of the registrar's office and the office of institutional research.
2. As each committee finishes its task, the result should be reviewed and approved by the department as a whole. This is intended to foster consensus on mission and context among department members.
3. The remaining three steps need to be done sequentially with departmental review at the completion of each step.
4. The envisioning-the-future section is the most creative step of the process. A (possibly new) ad hoc committee should begin by envisioning an ideal future without consideration of constraints. After possibilities have been identified and clarified, it should add constraints and write one or more scenarios describing an envisioned future for the department. If multiple scenarios are written, the department should discuss them and select one.
5. Typical time line:

Month 1: Two task forces carry out steps 1 and 2; the departmental administrative assistant completes step 3.

Month 2: SWOT analysis.

Month 3: Envisioning and goal setting (2 weeks each).
6. If some documents are missing, such as a departmental statement on scholarship, development of those documents may add additional time.
7. Some specialists in strategic planning claim that each step can be completed in 4-8 hours outside of department meetings. We'll see if our experience backs this up. Nevertheless, we should aim to keep the time each individual has to spend small enough that it is not burdensome.