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## The Tens—Ten Rules For Creating Good Higher Education Strategy



Higher education faces disruption from innovations in technology and business models. These disruptions threaten the relevancy of existing institutions and create uncertainty because the emergent models have yet to prove themselves. The only prediction that can be asserted with confidence is that the 21st Century learning experience will be different, and incumbent models will not survive by circling around the status quo. All institutions of higher learning, as well as those who seek to challenge and expand the market for post-secondary learning, need to think and act strategically in order to establish and maintain relevance.

**1. Create a vision, not just a vision statement** Too often colleges and universities try to encapsulate their vision in terse, concise statements that end up ill-equipped to guide them toward their goals. It is important that visions be broken down into actionable elements that can be delivered, tracked and adjusted.

**2. Lead accreditation with strategy** Accreditation work is often too disconnected from organizational strategy. Part of this disconnect comes from the way accreditors write standards and criteria, and part of it stems from organizations not taking the time to integrate the processes, identify common outputs and negotiate for a more inclusive view of the organization than accreditors may require. Good strategy should be the foundation for accreditation.

**3. Don't put an "expiration date" on the strategy** Expiration dates suggest an end. Strategy is an on-going, constantly evolving process. Decisions initiate action, or they stop some existing action. The arrival of new technologies, shifts in policy and emergent business models all impact strategy. Eliminating the expiration date on a strategic plan forces organizations to recognize that strategy requires an on-going dialog — strategy is not a straight path to goals, but a guide for navigating through uncertainty.

**4. Define investment plans for new capabilities** Strategies without funding can't be achieved. When envisioning new capabilities, it is incumbent upon school leadership to create sustainable funding models for those new capabilities, lest the capability and the strategy fail when one-time money from grants or other sources is no longer available.

**5. Execution is the next phase of the plan** Strategic planning processes should also avoid end dates, but individual deliverables do need to reflect deadlines. For many involved in the planning, the "end" of strategic planning is seen as their release back to "regular work." In organizations that don't just plan, but that act strategically, the plan is just the beginning. Every function and unit adopts those strategies, translating them into programs and practices that not just align, but reinforce the strategic intent of the organization.

**6. Use scenario planning to engage the future** The future is uncertain. Scenario planning helps organizations confront uncertainty and create plans that are not only more robust, but also more resilient in the face of change. By exploring how the interactions of various uncertainties could play-out in wildly divergent ways, organizations can better challenge their assumptions, practice contingencies and learn to think more strategically.

**7. Being inclusive: Co-create the future** Strategy is not the exclusive purview of senior faculty, administration and other leaders. For strategy to work, everyone must understand it, and that means creation must be open and inclusive. As colleges and universities execute strategy, students, faculty and the community all become part of a human network that can help sense change, and therefore, ensure that if circumstances are shifting, the institution can identify new threats and opportunities in time to react.

**8. Identify the things you will stop doing** It is relatively easy to identify a list of goals and objectives that a college or university aspires to. It is much harder to identify the current work that should stop. As vision is fulfilled, or as anticipated changes in policy, practice or technology occur, existing programs may be rendered irrelevant. Good strategy includes making these hard choices clear early in order to free up time, talent and budget for delivering on the new strategies.

**9. Define differentiated value** Every college or university knows it is unique. They regularly share that unique positioning with potential students or faculty. Unfortunately, many institutions fail to articulate their differentiation in their mission, vision and values. Consistent communication of intent is critical to transforming strategy into action.

**10. Don't ignore competition** Higher education has become a competitive market. Understanding competition helps organizations perceive their uniqueness and opportunities for growth. Competition aware schools employ their clear purpose to avoid operational and recruitment confusion.

For more in-depth analysis see *Planning at the Speed of Change* available [here](#).