The University’s statement of goals
An idea whose time has arrived

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Abstract. The need for universities and colleges to clarify their goals is discussed in light of current financial constraint. Reasons are provided supporting goal-definition including management techniques borrowed from the business world. Goal formulation strategies and techniques of the Institutional Goals Inventory (IGI) and the Delphi technique are addressed with specific attention paid to the application of the IGI at the University of Ottawa.

During this period of increased competition for limited financial resources institutions of higher education are being called upon to examine their purpose or goals more closely. Demands for organizational accountability placed on institutions by governments and accreditation boards, has clearly increased the need for institutions to clarify their goals. Commenting on the importance of goal identification, Richman and Farmer (1974) claim: “systematic consideration of the goals problem seems to be the most important thing that an academic manager or administrator should be doing now.” (p. 335).

Complex organizations share the common problem of how to improve the efficiency of their efforts to attain goals. The university is unique among organizations in that they have so many goals, and because their goals are often inconsistent with or in conflict with other goals. The university’s decision-making structure further complicates goal identification. Unlike the business world’s traditional bureaucratic model of top-down management, the university’s widely-dispersed decision-making powers make the development of objectives very difficult.

The identification of goals and the means by which to achieve them, represents a task of crucial importance to the future of colleges and universities. To remain effective a clear sense of purpose is essential for the institutions. It is through a clear understanding of the what and why for of an institution that decision-makers are able to contribute toward the development of an effective, well-respected institution. To define the goals of an organization is to clarify the very nature of its essence (Konrad, 1984).

Under conditions of changing needs and financial constraint, institutions of higher education should be striving to ensure they remain effective in the long-term. Survival is not enough, their goals should be to attain excellence. Writing on the assessment of institutional performance and progress, Sizer (1982) has
outlined the means by which institutions can try to achieve this ideal: a) by exam-
ingining systematically the future environment in which it will be operating and by identifying threats and opportunities; b) by understanding and communicating the implications of this future environment to the institution's constituencies; c) by evaluating the institution's current subject area portfolio and critical resources; d) by agreeing through consensus-building techniques the goals and objectives (i.e. mission statements) for the institution and its constituent parts, and the measures for monitoring progress towards achieving these goals and objects; and e) by developing a set of alternative long-term strategies and action oriented plans including a strategy for long-term resource mobility; a strategy for medium-term financial mobility, and a short-term planning and control system based on measurable information and performance indicators (possibly backed up by a nationally organized scheme for inter-institutional comparisons) (pp. 64–65).

With a challenging future facing them more colleges and universities are seriously questioning what their goals are, and what they should be. The study of goals logically marks the beginning of the whole planning process in higher education: "Establishing the mission and goals of the institution is the first step toward the effective use of resources. As a next step, every college [and university] should develop a strategy that will successfully guide the institution toward those goals" (Cope, 1978, p. 71).

**Mission, goals, objectives, defined**

Involved in the assessment of an institution's goals are its mission, goals and objectives. The statement of mission expresses the institution's educational philosophy; is a standard by which the institution may continually evaluate its policies, programs and performance; and tends to be longer-term than either the goals or objectives.

Goals are more specific and shorter-term than the mission, and in fact grow out of the institution's mission. They indicate a general sense of institutional direction.

Objectives are much more specific than either the mission or goals. They represent a desired result which is achieved through the accomplishment of specific activities within a set time frame.

Fenske (1980) has indicated there is no general consensus about the terms which are used to refer to goals (function, purpose, mission, objective, role, scope, aspiration) but many in the field view "goals" as an intermediate concept in a hierarchy between more general "missions" on the one hand and more specific "objectives" on the other.