

Team 3 – Review of Academic Plans from other Universities

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An Academic Plan micro-committee reviewed a sample of academic plans from other universities to identify elements and characteristics that might inform our approach to a StFX academic plan. The committee had access to 15 academic plans from Canadian universities, and focused attention on about seven. Members also looked at some university-wide strategic plans from across North America. The committee found the academic plans from [Concordia](#), [UPEI](#), and [Lakehead](#) had elements and approaches that were particularly helpful.

The committee identified the following as elements of a strong academic plan and recommends that the StFX academic plan include these elements:

1. The scope of the plan is clearly defined, indicating what is included within the plan and what falls under the responsibility of other planning exercises. It should be clear how the academic plan is different from the university-wide strategic plan. Some of the sample academic plans included issues related to research, while others indicated that research fell under a separate research plan.
2. The plan is grounded in an understanding of the current situation at the institution and specifically identifies challenges and weaknesses that the university faces.
3. The plan contains only a few focus areas (e.g., 4-5) rather than attempting to be inclusive of all possible goals and initiatives. In that respect, a stronger plan balances depth with breadth, and sets clear priorities (e.g., Concordia).
4. The plan includes a clear reporting process and accountability measures. This includes a mechanism for regularly updating the entire campus community. In addition, strong plans mapped who was responsible for the items, set a time line for delivery, and defined what metrics could be used to measure progress (e.g., UPEI and Concordia). Sometimes the plans used quantitative metrics to measure progress, but in some situations other types of metrics were appropriate.
5. The plan allows some room for flexibility. While the broad goals remain consistent and non-negotiable, some tactics may change to respond to the needs of specific units and to adapt to changing situations and opportunities

In summary, the committee recommends the academic plan contain the following sections:

- Context Information the current StFX situation including challenges and weaknesses (e.g. Brock)
- Scope of the exercise
- Summary of process (e.g. CBU)
- Four to five focus areas with succinct rationale for the goals (e.g., Concordia)
- Implementation and accountability plan (e.g., UPEI, Concordia), that includes a mechanism for individual units to continually engage with the plan.

Additional Observations

The Purpose of the academic plan:

The completed academic plan should be seen as a framework for ongoing conversation rather than simply a list of tasks to be completed. It should clarify StFX's academic aspirations and priorities, and it should set criteria or parameters for making decisions. The campus community must have the opportunity to actively engage and re-engage in the plan throughout its life in order to realize its potential.

Clarify the StFX context:

- **The academic planning exercise should start with a discussion of the current situation at StFX, and part of that discussion must acknowledge our weaknesses** (e.g. Brock plan). We can assess our current situation by reviewing the progress we have made implementing the existing StFX Strategic Plan. We can also assess StFX's performance on NSSE and use results from existing student surveys.
- **StFX's size and location must be a consideration in defining our academic priorities.** While these realities place limits on some potential initiatives, they also present opportunities. For example, StFX has the opportunity (and responsibility) to serve the specific needs of our region. StFX also has the opportunity to collaborate more across institutions through initiatives such as the Maple League, the Interuniversity PhD in Educational Studies, and the StFX MUN PhD partnership. Such collaborative efforts can both strengthen our programs and differentiate StFX.
- **The plan should also recognize that there are external pressures that will need to drive our activity in the next years.** For example, StFX is required to meet new provincial accessibility standards. Meeting those standards will require us to modifying teaching and learning practice to better accommodate student needs. This item is non-negotiable and must be considered in academic planning.
- **StFX needs to maximize the potential of our existing built environment**, and further, academic needs should drive future planning of the built environment.

Define the scope:

- Many of the academic plans were created after recent university-wide strategic planning exercises and are informed by those plans. StFX is approaching the academic planning exercise and a university-wide strategic plan renewal at the same time. There will have to be some intentional work to align both documents.
- While it is important to define the limits of the planning exercise in order to keep the project manageable, there will be issues that are important for academics that fall under other planning areas. For example, while issues related to research will generally fall outside the scope of this plan, undergraduate involvement in research may be explored as part of a discussion around high impact learning experiences. Similarly, issues around the student transition to university may fall within both the academic plan and a student

services plan. There will need to be cooperation between the relevant groups to align the effort.

Use a consultative process:

- Most of the sample plans were created by groups of faculty and staff and through processes of consultation, but there was a range in size and scope of the committees and the processes used. It is important to engage both with faculty and academic support staff, and well as more broadly.

Embed equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout the plan:

- The committee noted that there was variety in the way that equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives were included in the sample academic plans. In some plans, initiatives related to EDI were either mentioned in passing or were not included. In some plans EDI was a separate pillar with its own list of goals. In a few, EDI was embedded throughout the plan and EDI became a lens through which all initiatives were viewed (e.g. Lakehead). This approach appeared the most likely to drive discussion and change.