

Team 4: Consultation Questions

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An Academic Plan micro-committee met to brainstorm topics and questions that could be used to focus discussion during the first phase of consultation for the academic planning exercise. This group also discussed the best way to prepare the community ahead of the consultation sessions. In preparation for the meeting, the members reviewed 1) a collection of sample questions, 2) a sample discussion document that was used in the strategic research plan exercise, and 3) an article [Colleges need to Rethink Strategic Planning](#).

The committee makes the following recommendations:

1. The questions and consultation process be focused and respectful of the time commitment. Faculty and staff have dealt with many challenges during the past year; they need to have opportunities to participate in the planning exercise in ways that do not require an onerous time commitment.
2. The process should be designed around questions that focus on the issues that really matter to the participants. This will allow participants to engage in the issues that are most meaningful to them.
3. The process should be designed around questions that will prompt clear strategy.
4. The process should be informed by a relatively succinct discussion document that presents the main issues, describes the context for each, and offers options.
5. The committee recommends the use of the discussion questions (attached). Another micro committee will look at the way these questions can be used during the consultation.

Questions to guide strategy:

The questions that are used in the consultation process should prompt the community to design a strategy for academics at StFX. Distilled from the article noted above, the following are some observations about what makes good planning strategy:

- Strategy is informed by understanding the realities of the environment (both internal and external). In order to form strategy, we need first to understand the context.
- Strategy exists if there is a choice to do the opposite. For example, a university is not making a strategic decision when it commits to the principal of academic excellence. The opposite (focusing on mediocrity?) is not a real option. For this example, strategy develops when the university makes decisions about where (and where not) to concentrate energy to achieve academic excellence.
- Strategy is different from operational tactics which can adapt and change over the life of a plan.

Additional comments and observations:

- **Implementation:** The plan will not be successfully realized if people are not continually using it. The committee strongly recommends that an implementation process be clearly laid out in the academic plan. This implementation process should include a framework for constant self-assessment by units. Regular updates to the community are important, but equally or more important is the process of continual self-assessment at the unit level, e.g., departments, programs, Faculties, committees, staff units.
- **Motivation:** People are motivated to act on items that are relevant and rewarding to them. All members of the community should be able to see themselves as leaders in implementing some aspect of the plan.
- **Flexibility:** The plan should be framed around non-negotiable broad strategies, but the ways that different units work toward achieving the goals will look different. There must be room for units to apply the goals in ways that make sense to them, and be supported to continually modify their tactics as they advance toward achieving the goal.

Sample Consultation Questions

1. Foundation

- What progress have we made on achieving the goals set out in the StFX strategic plan? What remains to be achieved? Are the pillars still meaningful or should they shift? What are the barriers to success? What supports need to be in place to allow us to continue the work?

2. General Questions

- What are some things we've learned from the StFX's response to the Covid-19 pandemic: about StFX as an institution, our values, our students? How might we take what we've learned this year and build from it?
- If StFX is 'university as it is meant to be', what should that look like in the future? What would need to be included in our academic plan to achieve this?

3. Questions to understand the context

(We could provide answers to these questions in the discussion document that people would access prior to the consultation sessions)

- Who are the students we are trying to attract and how are their needs and aspirations changing?
- How is the higher education environment evolving?
- What is research telling us about how students learn and about supports they need?
- Who are our comparators -both traditional and non-traditional- and in what ways are they doing things differently? What can NSSE tell us about this? Other data?

4. Questions to guide strategy

Issue 1: Equity, diversity, and inclusion

- The StFX strategic plan committed to principles of equity, diversity and inclusion and to furthering Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission : What parts of our culture have to change to make our community more equitable, diverse and inclusive? What specific strategies should we enact to address this?
- What current StFX policies and practices are a barrier to EDI? How can they be changed?
- What professional development approaches can best help faculty and staff to employ EDI across all aspects of their work: teaching, research and service?
- What supports do students need that we don't already provide? How are those supports different for different groups of students? How do we provide them?

Issue 2: Programs

Supporting existing programs

- How can we support existing/ core programs in creative new ways that encourage innovation and cooperation?
- What approaches will support inclusive, decolonized curriculum?
- What are the most important ways that we support faculty to deliver high quality programs?
- What criteria and parameters should be used to determine where we put resources?
- Are there aspects of our existing quality assurance processes that can be made more efficient or more effective? (e.g. Senate review processes)
- Is there any value in creating/ formalizing program standards within faculties? What might that look like?

New Program Offerings

- How can we distinguish/ differentiate StFX by the programs we offer?
- What criteria can we use to determine which programs or credential types to develop?
- What new program areas and/ or credential types should we support at the graduate and undergraduate level?

Issue 3: Teaching & Learning

- What supports do students need that we don't already provide? How are those supports different for different groups of students? How do we provide them?
- Which high quality teaching practices should we emphasize both inside the classroom and more broadly in the campus community?
- How can we continue to support faculty teaching innovation?