


# Planning to SOAR: A Strengths-Based Approach to Strategic Planning

Higher Learning Commission 2012 Annual Conference  
Chicago, IL




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Presented by:

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## About the College



- Two-year, open access, regional college of the University of Cincinnati
- 25 miles from UC campus
- One of 24 regional campuses in Ohio
- Award associate degrees, certificates and one technical baccalaureate degree




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## Fall 2012 Demographics

- 3,871 Headcount enrollment
- 2,830 Full-time equivalent
- 94% Ohio residents
- 62% Full-time
- 57% Female
- 63% Traditional (24 and younger)



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## The Landscape

- 2 Interim Deans
- Restructuring by UC
- Semester Conversion



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## The Right Time

*By the fall of 2010*

- New dean
- New UC East site
- Academic structure intact
- Semester Conversion underway



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*If we were going to get where we wanted to go,  
we needed to get in shape!*



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### Where do we want to go?

- Dean selects consultant
- Strategic Planning Steering Committee
- Focus on mission, vision, core values and 3 breakthrough goals
- All-College Summit



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### The Summit

- Half-day event planned in May 2012
- Classes canceled & offices closed
- Over 175 faculty and staff participate
- 20 facilitators
- Small group discussions to gather feedback on mission, vision, core values and 3 breakthrough goals



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## From Talk to Action

Action Teams assembled:

- Team A: *Mission, Vision & Core Values*
- Team B: *Adjust academic programs to match the needs of the future student*
- Team C: *Manage our long-term decision making with data-informed models*
- Team D: *Build our leadership capacity and strengthen our partnerships, organization and community relations*




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## Action Team Timeline

- 9/19-9/23:** Select the Action Team(s) you want to join
- 9/26-9/30:** Action Team memberships announced
- 10/3-10/7:** Action Teams meet, select team champion (leader), establish meeting schedule, review All-College Summit feedback, identify priorities and create sub-committees as necessary
- 10/31:** Mid-term progress report due
- 12/5:** Final recommendations report due

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## The Thin Book of SOAR

Information adapted and excerpted from:  
*The Thin Book of SOAR, Building Strengths-Based Strategy* by Jacqueline M. Stavros and Gina Hinrichs, 2009




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## SOAR Strategy

### **Strengths/Opportunities/Aspirations/Results**

“SOAR is a strategic planning framework with an approach that focuses on strengths and seeks to understand the whole system by including the voices of the relevant stakeholders.”

*The Thin Book of SOAR, Building Strengths-Based Strategy by Jacqueline M. Stavros and Gina Hinrichs, 2009*

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## Action Team Charge

Each Action Team will review data and All-College Summit feedback to:

- Identify and build on strengths
- Discover opportunities that UCCC aspires to pursue
- Determine objectives that are aligned with the goal
- Identify or create new strategies, systems, processes, and structures to support the goal and objectives, and
- Recommend an implementation plan to guide decision making and actions




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## Leading Change

**“The task of leadership is to create an alignment of strengths, making our weaknesses irrelevant.”**

*Peter Drucker*




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SWOT vs. SOAR	
SWOT Analysis	SOAR Approach
Analysis oriented	Action oriented
Weaknesses & Threats focus	Strengths & Opportunity focus
Competition focus – Just be better	Possibility focus – Be the best!
Incremental improvement	Innovation & breakthroughs
Top down	Engagement of all levels
Focus on Analysis Planning	Focus on Planning Implementation
Energy depleting – There are so many weaknesses and threats	Energy creating – We are good and can become great!
Attention to Gaps	Attention to Results

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## Strengths



- What are we doing really well?
- What are our greatest assets?
- What are we most proud of accomplishing?
- What do our strengths tell us about our skills?

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## Opportunities



- How do we collectively understand outside threats?
- How can we reframe to see the opportunity?
- What is the college asking us to do?
- How can we best partner with others?

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## Aspirations

- Considering Strengths and Opportunities, who should we become?
- How do we allow our values to drive our vision?
- How can we make a difference for our organization and its stakeholders?




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## Results



- What are our measurable results?
- What do we want to be known for?
- How do we tangibly translate Strengths, Opportunities and Aspirations?




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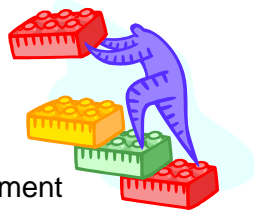
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## 5-I Approach

- Initiate
- Inquire
- Imagine
- Innovate
- Inspire to Implement




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## 5-I Approach at UC Clermont

- *Initiate* – All-College Summit in May, 2011
- *Inquire* – Use guiding questions to start a strategic conversation that allows for stakeholders' aspirations to be heard
- *Imagine* – Use responses from *Inquire* to identify "high potential opportunities"
- *Innovate* – Prioritize *Imagine* opportunities into strategic initiatives (objectives) and action items
- *Inspire to Implement* – Define meaningful and measurable goals and use results for course corrections (annually)




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## Inquire



### *Inquire* – Asking the SOAR Questions

- In this phase, Action Team participants engage in conversations in small groups using the feedback from the All-College Summit and the guiding questions.




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## Inquire - Guiding Questions

### Strengths – What can we build on?

- What are we most proud of as an organization? How does that reflect our greatest strength?
- What makes us unique? What can we be best at in our world?
- What is our proudest achievement in the last year or two?
- How do we use our **strengths** to get results?
- How do our strengths fit with the realities of the marketplace?
- What do we do or provide that is world class for our students, our industry and other potential stakeholders?




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## Inquire - Guiding Questions

### Opportunities – What are our stakeholders asking for?

- How do we make sense of opportunities provided by external forces and trends?
- What are the top three **opportunities** on which we should focus our efforts?
- How can we best meet the needs of our stakeholders?
- Who are possible new students?




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## Inquire - Guiding Questions

### Opportunities – What are our stakeholders asking for?

- How can we distinctively differentiate ourselves from existing or potential competitors?
- What are possible new programs, services, processes?
- How can we **reframe** challenges to be seen as exciting opportunities?
- What new skills do we need to move forward?




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## Inquire - Guiding Questions

### Aspirations – What do we care deeply about?

- When we explore our values and aspirations, "what are we deeply passionate about?"
- Reflecting on Strengths and Opportunities conversations, who are we, who should we become, and where should we go in the future?
- What is our most compelling **aspiration**?
- What strategic initiatives (i.e. projects, programs and processes) would support our aspirations?




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## Inquire - Guiding Questions

**Results – How do we know we are succeeding?**

- Considering our Strengths, Opportunities and Aspirations, what meaningful measures would indicate that we are on track to achieving our goals?
- What resources are needed to **implement** our most vital projects?




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## Imagine

***Imagine* - Creating a shared vision**

- Teams engage in “possibility thinking”
- Visualize actions that reflect high potential opportunities, values and aspirations of the community





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## Innovate

***Innovate* – Designing the objectives**

- Transform creative ideas into action items
- Prioritize and design best possibilities





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## Inspire to Implement

### ***Inspire to Implement* – Going from Possibilities to Inspired Action**

- Plans require action to lead to success
- Meaningful and measurable goals are defined
- Many stakeholders with different skills sets working on linked projects



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## Celebrate

- Strategic Planning Update Summit



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## Results

**“A leader is best when people barely know he exists. When his work is done, they will say: we did it ourselves.”**  
**Lao Tzu**



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## Results

- Strengthen partnerships with local high schools to support student success at all levels
- Partner with local daycare providers to reduce costs and increase options for our students




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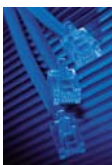
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## Results

- Explore online and weekend-only class/degree opportunities
- Explore additional associate and technical baccalaureate degree opportunities
- Explore, implement & promote new technologies to improve access to library and Learning Center services




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## Results

- Make data-informed decisions about Student Success.
- Use data to inform the development and implementation of a comprehensive enrollment management plan.




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## Results

- Adapt and implement the academic program review model for institutional support units.
- Engage Alumni.
- Provide opportunities for Faculty and business leaders to interface to make sure that students are job ready.




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## Results

- Develop our own faculty/staff leadership program(s).
- Communicate existing leadership programs, internal and external, to all faculty and staff.
- Develop a plan for supporting/mentoring new faculty/staff and identify any needed resources.




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## Results

- Increase experiential learning opportunities through creation of Center for Community Partnerships and Programs (C2P2).
- Strengthen/develop leadership skills of student body.




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## Lessons Learned

- Focus on strengths from the beginning
- Embed SOAR ambassador on each Action Team
- Promote participation by many stakeholders
- Provide resources, promote transparency and check on progress often
- CELEBRATE!



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## Questions



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