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

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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
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)

The Landscape

- 2 Interim Deans
- Restructuring by UC
- Semester Conversion

The Right Time

*By the fall of 2010*
- New dean
- New UC East site
- Academic structure intact
- Semester Conversion underway
If we were going to get where we wanted to go, we needed to get in shape!

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

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
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

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

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
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

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

Leading Change

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

Peter Drucker
**SWOT vs. SOAR**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SWOT Analysis</th>
<th>SOAR Approach</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analysis oriented</td>
<td>Action oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaknesses &amp; Threats focus</td>
<td>Strengths &amp; Opportunity focus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competition focus – Just be better</td>
<td>Possibility focus – Be the best!</td>
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<tr>
<td>Incremental improvement</td>
<td>Innovation &amp; breakthroughs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Top down</td>
<td>Engagement of all levels</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus on Analysis Planning</td>
<td>Focus on Planning Implementation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Energy depleting – There are so many weaknesses and threats</td>
<td>Energy creating – We are good and can become great</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attention to Gaps</td>
<td>Attention to Results</td>
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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?

**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?
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?

Results

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

5-I Approach

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

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?

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?
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?

Imagine

Imagine - Creating a shared vision
• Teams engage in “possibility thinking”
• Visualize actions that reflect high potential opportunities, values and aspirations of the community

Innovate

Innovate – Designing the objectives
• Transform creative ideas into action items
• Prioritize and design best possibilities
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

Celebrate
• Strategic Planning Update Summit

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
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

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

Results

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

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.

Results

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

Questions

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