ELRC 7609 Strategic Plan Review

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**Background**

Columbia State Community College is a small community college located in Columbia, Tennessee. Columbia State is a member of the Tennessee Board of Regents system, governed by the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, and has an average enrollment of 5,600 students on an annual basis across its five campuses located across the southern-central Tennessee Region. I have served as a program coordinator for the college since the fall semester of the 2018-2019 academic year. This is my first administrative position in the higher education system and it falls under the academic affairs division. This strategic plan review will evaluate the different aspects of Columbia State’s strategic plan.

**Vision Statement**

Columbia State vision statement “Columbia State Community College will be the “1st Choice" for those seeking post-secondary learning and hailed as outstanding by students, community partners and national benchmarks” (Columbia State). From our discussions regarding vision statements in this course, I wanted to review a few elements of our vision statement that stand out.

First, the notion of motivating staff is very important to me. Now more than ever, faculty and staff are being asked to do more with less. Encouraging and motivating staff should be a priority of the vision statement if we expect staff to support our vision. W.P.K Darbi’s concluded the same in his study finding that “…vision statements are still relevant strategic management tools that can impact employee behavior.” (2012) In Columbia State’s vision statement, we list what I consider to be two very lofty goals that I aspire as a faculty member to meet. The first I believe is purely motivational by design and that is as an institution, we will be the “1st choice” for students seeking a post-secondary career. (Columbia State) In a time period with such amount of choices students have for post-secondary education, it is important that as an institution our faculty and staff help create an environment that is known for exceptional education. Becoming the “1st choice” is certainly a stretch but certainly within reach and serves as a motivational reminder for me each day to give my best in the classroom.

Secondly, our vision statement shows support for all of our organizational interest. At the end of the day, we want to be seen as outstanding by all our stakeholders including students, community partners, and benchmarks. An institution will not profit nor thrive without obtaining such a status. Additionally, I believe our vision statement supports the elements discussed of not having a one-time specific goal. Columbia State’s vision statement shows a prolonged vision that is not quickly met but offers a long term goal for the institution.

There is one specific element of our vision statement that I would like to address for improvement and that centers on the suggestion that a vision statement be unlikely influenced by markets or technology changes. Including benchmarks as a constituency of being hailed as outstanding may not be fair in that benchmarks can and often do change. These changes could unfairly leave our organization to be hailed as less than outstanding.

**Mission Statement**

When looking at our mission statement, I wanted to ensure that our mission answers the question as to why we even exists as an organization. (Papulova, 2014) Our mission statement, “Columbia State Community College nurtures success and positively changes lives through teaching, learning and service” (Columbia State) couldn’t address our reason for existence any more simply put. As discussed in class, it’s attentive to the needs of our audience through “nurturing success” and “changing lives”. (Columbia State).

In addition to answering the purpose of existence, our mission statement also addresses what we long to be remembered for in that we want to bring about success and change lives through the acts of teaching, learning, and service. (Columbia State). The statement itself is very concise and easy to understand and, like our vision statement, seeks to motivate and inspire commitment by giving faculty and staff a roadmap in which to complete the mission via teaching, learning, and service. While I certainly understand our mission statement, its wording does appear a bit grand on the vocabulary scale and I feel that it may not be received with the breadth as written by our stakeholders based on the average educational level of our community.

**Additional Strategic Plan Elements**

Columbia State’s strategic plan list several college goals and includes key performance indicators (KPIs) to address those goals. I will address a few of those goals in this review.

**Student Success**

Our first goal is centered on increasing the number of citizens with diplomas, certificates, and degrees in our service area. Our KPIs suggest an increase in three year graduation rates of just over twenty one percent each year with data showing that we have successfully accomplished this goal beginning with the 2015-2016 academic year.

**Enrollment**

The second goal that I want to review focuses on enrollment. Columbia State seeks to steadily increase enrollment rates with a fall 2020 enrollment rate of over 6,000 students. While COVID is going to play a major role in the success (or failure) of this goal, it is important to note that as an institution, we are succeeding in our goals to increase enrollment.

**Resourcefulness**

The final goal I want to review states that Columbia State will work to identify and enhance alternate revenue sources and continue to efficiently use all available resources. As reminded in several of our readings this semester, public funding is on the decline with state governments consistently decreasing budget allotments for higher education. It is imperative that we continue to explore alternate revenue streams. One of measured outcomes we hope to achieve is acquiring at least thirty percent of all grants applied for. Grants are a wonderful source of revenue for the university especially in resource heavy areas. So far in our strategic plan, Columbia State has maintained acquisitions of over forty percent of the grants applied for.

**Strategic Communication**

Columbia State does an excellent job at communicating its strategic plan, specifically the individual elements to its stakeholders. It is available in plain site on our website ([www.columbiastate.edu](http://www.columbiastate.edu)) and accessible without having to click through other pages to locate. The plan is well laid out, digestible, and list easy to understand goals and outcomes to help set our institution apart and fosters our vision and mission statements. The plan was created in 2015 and is revised annually as new KPI information is released.

**Internal Communications and Expectations**

Our current college President, Dr. Janet Smith, expects that all employees learn our vision and mission statements immediately on hire, and additionally requires each new employee to meet with a member of the strategic plan committee within one week of hire to review the strategic plan.

**External Communication**

College marketing staff have done an incredible job at marketing our institution and have worked hard over the past few years to simplify unify our branding. We have seen a noticeable increase in public relations events being held both on and off campus including events that are signature to Columbia State such as Linemen Days and our regions annual HOSA competition. Our prehospital emergency medical services program and mechanical engineering programs are well known in our region.

**SWOT**

Columbia State’s strategic planning committee did not perform a SWOT analysis at our most recent annual review of our strategic plan due to the COVID pandemic. I disagreed with our committees approach and believe the COVID would have been a major threat and thus a solid reason to perform such an analysis.

We have many strengths especially in regards to our small size and faculty to student ratio. In addition, we are well revered in our community and continue to meet both institutional and Tennessee Board of Regents (TBR) goals. One of our most important weaknesses I feel is our faculty and staff turnover and this problem is not being dealt with appropriately. Because of such high turnover, students are reeling the impact of additional adjunct instruction v. full time faculty instruction and that is noticeable in our ability to better service our student’s needs.

Columbia State has a major opportunity to capitalize on recent legislation authorizing additional tuition assistance via state plans to increase enrollment. Separate and apart from that, we have established incredible pathways for students to continue to their education toward a bachelor’s degree, often while even attending those courses at our institution.

As mentioned above, I believe COVID continues to be our major threat. Not only will COVID play a role in decreased college admissions this summer and fall, it may very well have a long lasting impact on those high cost degrees for jobs that were so easily lost during this pandemic in our country. Our Blumenstyk readings suggest many different threats in this arena even point blank stating that “Liberal arts colleges are dying” (Blumenstyk, p. 142).

**Final Thoughts**

Columbia State is in a great position to carry out our strategic plan. Our mission and vision statements, while having room to be improved, nestle the college forward in its ability to achieve its goal of student success. Great are the current threats to higher education across the country right now, Im simply thankful for our leadership and planning that has not only seen our college success to this point, but helped guide and carry us through.

**Application**

I am appreciative of this assignment as it forced me to once again review our vision and mission statements and review out strategic plan. I stated early on in this course the importance of continually reviewing your current state of affairs and how that aligns with your goals for the future.

References

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