Why do we need to do strategic planning now?

Periodic strategic planning is essential to help large complex institutions such as the University of Hartford prepare for the future with a vision and road map that positions the institution for future opportunities and challenges. It has been approximately five years since the University’s last strategic planning exercise. Given current external conditions affecting all universities and colleges—for example, changing demographics, the challenges and opportunities associated with online learning, and shifting public expectations for high-quality undergraduate and graduate education—now is a particularly critical time to reevaluate overall institutional strategy. This is also an opportunity to integrate a number of large planning and assessment efforts we have undertaken in the past several years and to move those efforts toward implementation.

Why are we using a consultant for strategic planning? What kind of process do they use?

Using an outside consultant is useful for this strategic initiative because it helps mitigate the perception that participants will make decisions based on their own self interests, and it provides content experts to guide the campus through a process in a timely fashion. We have selected the NAPA Group, a strategy, leadership, and organizational consulting firm to assist us. They bring an external perspective and methodology which partners with the campus leadership to develop the outcomes of the strategic planning process. The NAPA Group’s process engages various stakeholders around similar questions that gradually widen the circle of participation in identifying alignment of thinking in key areas. Their process framework also supports the University’s leadership in engaging the campus community, regents, and other stakeholders around specific, core questions that provide insight as the planning process unfolds.

They provide oversight of a six-month long process that moves from vision/mission to:

- Articulate strategic themes;
- Identify realistic strategic solutions, informed by data and analytics, with alignment, shared responsibility, and accountability;
- Assess and validate blueprints for multi-year strategic activities;
- Create a business plan and annual financial modeling, aligning goals with activities; and
- Implementation planning that guides, tracks, measures and reports milestones, accomplishments and accountability

For more information on The NAPA Group or their planning process, please visit their website:

http://www.napagroup.com/
Who is leading the strategic planning effort?

The leadership of the strategic planning process is the leadership of the University: the President and Senior Officers with oversight from the Board of Regents. The President, Officers and the Regents’ Strategic Planning Committee secured the expertise of The NAPA Group to guide the campus in this strategic planning exercise.

Membership on the Regents Strategic Planning Committee can be found at:

https://www.hartford.edu/aboutuofh/office_pres/committees/strategic-plan/leadership.aspx

How will this plan differ from previous strategic plans in focus and structure?

We are moving into this Strategic Plan armed with data, facts, and information gathered from the Facilities Master Plan, Faculty Compensation study, NEASC accreditation review, Market Research study, and the Branding Initiative. Most importantly, we have identified funding sources for strategic initiatives through the Foundation of the Future initiative and are committed to linking the Strategic Plan to realistic financial planning.

The leadership of the University invites the campus community to engage in formulating this Strategic Plan around the information already gathered from the initiatives above and the external scan that will be provided by our consultants, The NAPA Group. Previous strategic plans at the University were overly broad, lacked the analyses needed to formulate action items, and were not accompanied by a feasible budget model to guide implementation.

What is the role of the Board of Regents?

The Regents serve as strategic partners with the Officers of the University in the strategic planning process. They bring technical and domain expertise to the exercise and participate in institution-wide priority setting. The Board’s Strategic Planning Committee has been and will continue to be engaged throughout the process, helping to identify and shape strategic themes and goals. The Committee, which is made up of Regents, members of the administration, faculty, and staff serves as the Steering Committee of the overall strategic planning exercise and also acts as the key liaison to the full Board of Regents.

The final Strategic Plan, including an implementation framework and attending budget modeling will be submitted to the full Board for consideration and approval.
How have the consultants engaged the community?

The NAPA Group employs multiple methods to engage our community in a cooperative process. They describe their approach as one that is both collaborative and inclusive and that continues to widen the circle of engagement, asking similar questions of all constituents, and assessing alignment around key themes. They utilize numerous processes to assist the campus in defining vision/mission, key strategic themes and to conduct a SWOT analysis through listening sessions, focus groups, visioning sessions, and online surveys. A complete timeline and list of engagement activities can be found on the strategic planning website:

http://www.hartford.edu/aboutuofh/office_pres/committees/strategic-plan/

Who has been involved in activities to date? What kind of activities were these?

The NAPA Group has engaged a wide variety of our University community in focus groups, visioning sessions, and online surveys. A complete timeline, list of activities, and participants are posted on the Strategic Planning website:


How were faculty and staff selected to participate in the various sessions with the consultants, to serve on Solution Teams, and/or to serve on the Implementation Teams?

The consultants defined an ideal number of total participants at each step of the process—from the early listening sessions through team membership—in order for the processes to be most productive. They suggested that the groups be as diverse as possible and pull widely from the overall campus membership. Faculty and staff were nominated by the Officers and Council of Deans with input from the Faculty Senate leadership and the Officers. Final vetting ensured some reasonable balance of participation regarding affiliation, gender, years of service for staff, and rank for faculty.
What is the overall process timeline?

Beginning in May 2013, the overall project plan was created with The NAPA Group. The Leadership Team and the Regents Strategic Planning Committee were formulated. Various activities, including listening sessions, surveys, and focus group visioning activities have been conducted from June through September. Solution Teams were configured as the key strategic themes were identified through the various alignment exercises based on those areas where there was most agreement. Solution teams worked to identify several strategic actions to advance the goals, and an initial draft was vetted by the Board of Regents, then posted for campus comment in mid-December. The comment period on the draft plan closed in late January. A final draft will be prepared for review by the Board of Regents. More information about the various phases of The NAPA Group’s process and the University timeline can be found at:


What is role of the Implementation Teams?

Implementation of the Strategic Plan requires both immediate and longer-term planning and oversight. The Implementation Teams now will work on the Phase I Implementation. Co-Chairs of the Implementation Teams serve as champions and advocates for one of the five strategic plan goals for a 24-month period. They work with the President, the Officers, and others to ensure effective and meaningful execution of the strategic plan, goals, and initiatives. The teams define Year 1-2 action items, map implementation steps, identify milestones and benchmarks to track progress, and provide regular updates to the Officers and the Strategic Planning Committee of the Board of Regents. The Implementation Team champions also identify and work to address other issues that might impede implementation as they arise, such as those that are related to budget or human resources.

Why is the strategic planning timeline so condensed?

Strategic planning usually begins with a series of external and internal environmental scans in order to identify and assess key factors that are impacting or will impact the organization (such as economic, social, technological trends). Due to a number of major planning exercises in recent years, the University has systematically conducted studies, analyses, and surveys to gather relevant data and assess the results. These exercises (for example, the NEASC Self-Study and Foundation of the Future) provide a solid platform upon which to launch a strategic planning process that allows our institution to move more quickly through the customary strategic planning phases. We can build on our substantial planning base and move forward with a condensed strategic exercise and timeline.
Links to the NEASC Self Study and Foundation of the Future documents:


If this is an evidence- and data-driven process, where can I find that information?

The activities structured by The NAPA Group have engaged a variety of University community members, and the consultants have provided articles and summaries related to the external environment impacting higher education. In addition, the thoughts, perspectives, and themes emerging from these sessions are captured in summary documents that are posted on the strategic planning website for community viewing. As further evidence and data are gathered throughout the strategic planning process, it will also be shared on the strategic planning website under the link titled “Resources.” Note that part of this information will require you to log in:

https://www.hartford.edu/aboutuofh/office_pres/committees/strategic-plan/controlled_access_docs/default.aspx

What is the relationship of strategic planning to Foundation of the Future?

Foundation of the Future was a review and prioritization process of the University’s academic programs as well as its administrative programs and services. In this sense, while it was not a Strategic Plan, it prepared us for strategic planning. We made some hard choices about what we would no longer do and what we might resource differently, and we identified some areas for possible investment. The strategic planning process is informed by Foundation of the Future, along with other major planning processes we have undertaken in the past several years, such as the SimpsonScarborough Market Research, the Campus Master Plan, the Sitelines assessment of our physical plant, the Academic Strategic Pathways, the Full-time Faculty Compensation Study, and Libraries Master Planning.

The strategic planning process underway builds on this previous work in identifying several key themes or areas in which the University of Hartford will focus its actions and resources as it moves forward toward fiscal balance while it continues to grow distinction.
Who makes the final decisions about strategic directions and goals?

The Senior Officers of the institution will make the final decisions about strategic directions and goals, but these directions and goals must be approved by the Board of Regents.

What are the expected deliverables and outcomes of this process?

The ultimate objective is to create a platform and a culture that will allow the University to consistently adapt and change to the demands of the external environment while maintaining its core values and strengths. The expected deliverables are 1-5 strategic goals that will support the University’s vision and mission along with a series of initiatives that are identified by Solution Teams and refined through a vetting process. Ultimately, operational action items will be built into the implementation plan, including multi-year budget models and benchmarking metrics that will guide the institution over the next several years.

How will the final Strategic Plan be funded?

The strategic planning process focuses on identifying initiatives and areas for investment and resource allocation that will lead our institution forward. Budget planning to implement the Strategic Plan will reflect the goals and actions acknowledged and developed through the planning process as grounded in our fiscal realities. Incremental revenues, including those from fundraising and as well as new sources of revenue, and resources identified by the Foundation of the Future initiative will fund the Strategic Plan.

What do transparency and engagement mean regarding this exercise?

Transparency in this process means that information, perspectives, and insights will be shared across the University community throughout the exercise on the Strategic Planning website and other updates. Additionally, the website contains a resource link to articles and data that provide important contextual information so the entire campus community can better understand the realities confronting higher education and the University. Each member of the University community is encouraged to become engaged in this important process and to become an informed participant. Resources, timelines, and opportunities for engagement can all be found on the strategic planning website:

http://www.hartford.edu/aboutuofh/office_pres/committees/strategic-plan/
How does the previous Academic Strategic Plan inform the current process?

The previous Academic Strategic Plan informed the Academic Pathways document. The latter prioritized the goals and objectives of the original document in order to focus on important areas that emerged during the NEASC Self-Study (for example, our branding initiative and the faculty compensation exercise).