Research paper on strategic planning and accreditation

Business, Strategy

In order to ensure that American universities and colleges are able to maintain their high quality in an increasingly globalized world, certain characteristics must be maintained. Senator Lamar Alexander's challenge to higher education leaders was to emphasize institutional autonomy, competition and choice, commitment to excellence and deregulation in strategic planning of colleges. In order to incorporate these and other factors into strategic planning for leaders in higher education, a number of steps must be taken.

In order to develop a strategic plan for a college or university based on Senator Alexander's characteristics, an institutional self-assessment must be made to ensure that the school itself is behaving autonomously, providing choice to students, maintaining high academic standards and loosening regulatory grip on departments and fields. Self-assessments are built through conceptual frameworks which allow assessors to evaluate the quality of higher institutions; in the case of Senator Alexander's remarks, the conceptual approach should focus on these four characteristics. Tools such as balanced scorecards, quality and strategy maps and more can be used to implement these self-assessments (Kettunen, 2008). Higher education websites can also be used to assess competitive advantage, comparing the level of information and quality of programs advertized on websites to determine the level of competition being dealt with (Meyer and Wilson, 2010).

For this particular self-assessment, leaders and stakeholders can be given a scorecard centered around four categories discussing Alexander's positions: Institutional Autonomy, Competition/Choice, Commitment to Excellence and

Deregulation. In each section, questions are asked regarding issues such as the level to which the institution is allowed to operate on their own without regulatory interference, how well they feel they are competing with other universities, their academic performance, and others. This subjective assessment can be combined in a mixed methods approach with statistical analysis of a school's GPA average in their student body, enrollment of the school compared to their closest competitors, number of government restrictions on university activity, and so forth. By combining these methods, it is possible to find an institutional self-assessment that will function well for all involved.

Strategic planning for college leaders is heavily influenced by the politics and history of the school in question. When conducting strategic planning initiatives for universities, leaders must rely heavily on the school's history of curriculum, its traditions, its relationships with students and alumni, and more when attempting to figure out what is working and what is not. When planning, leaders must consider the initiatives and responses of past changes in order to determine whether or not they were effective in facilitating positive change. Having a concrete knowledge of the institution's strategic planning and administrative history is vital to ensuring that the same mistakes are not repeated again.

Politics is also an incredibly influential factor in strategic planning; business and administrative decisions are often political, as they must maintain a balance between keeping the student and faculty populations happy, while also tying in to government regulation in an appropriate manner. Both federal and campus politics are substantial institutional variables that must

be considered in strategic planning, as these populations must be balanced in order to stay within the letter of the law and cultivate a campus culture that is accommodating to those who wish to enroll and study there.

When determining ways of maintaining academic excellence, and holding the staff and faculty of said institution accountable for their actions, accreditation plays a vital role. The institution of accreditation has been a long-standing metric for determining which colleges and universities are of high quality in higher education, and can be both self-assessed and granted to universities through the appropriate regulatory bodies and accrediting organizations (Eaton, 2010). Accreditation is somewhat of a gatekeeping process, as it provides a major incentive for federal grant funding, enrollment and more to universities, with accreditation basically being a necessity for colleges to succeed.

Government has become more and more involved in the process of accreditation in the intervening years, as the US Department of Education reviews accrediting organizations every five years, thus providing gatekeeping duties for the gatekeepers themselves (Eaton, 2010). That being said, accreditation is incredibly important in securing federal funding, maintaining a high quality of education, and checking in on the faculty and staff of an institution to ensure they are performing to an appropriate standard of quality. Accreditation is important in strategic planning, as it provides a measure for improvement and a basic goal to be maintained when implementing new changes to a given institution.

Leaders and stakeholders alike are incredibly influential in creating comprehensive learning plans that factor in global learner development in

both courses and student life in general. Currently, leaders have many different factors to consider in modern strategic planning in higher education – costs of operation are rising, competition is becoming tighter, there is more pressure for accountability, and changing demographics of the student/faculty body means there are many different sets of stakeholders to be catered to (Spanier, 2010). In order to address these issues, a comprehensive learning plan would have to accommodate a more global level of competition in terms of education quality, as well as the campus life of its student body. While leaders make these decisions, stakeholders must be given avenues to voice their concerns and provide input for the leader to heavily consider when forming said plan – their investment in the institution (regardless of level) must be honored, as leaders are at the whims of the stakeholders if an institution is not running to their satisfaction.

Adapting to these cultural and political changes requires leaders to emphasize a number of new factors which must be considered in order to accommodate stakeholders and successfully adapt these measures to a better college or university culture. Student centeredness is an incredibly important measure, as it provides a singular focus on the stakeholders who depend most on the services and curriculum of the school (Spanier, 2010). Interdisciplinary research will also provide flexible options to students, thus making the school more attractive to those students looking for diverse learning cultures. Granting greater access and affordability to schools will also increase student interest, as well as making the university more globalized by welcoming students and faculty from all around the world. A greater focus on technology will bring about many of these changes, and a

service-based approach to education may coalesce all of these elements and ensure that students and stakeholders are well-served at the university.

In order to keep up with the myriad changes and fluctuations that are occurring in the world of higher education, leaders must hold themselves more accountable to the fluctuating and constantly changing needs of students and stakeholders. Accreditation must be maintained at all costs, through repeated self-assessment that focuses on ensuring competitiveness and affordability within the field of higher education. Leaders must be well aware of the history of their institution, as well as the political factors that must be navigated when determining what changes to make in strategic planning. If leaders in higher education can navigate all of these factors and keep a close eye on the mélange of factors that go into strategic planning, they can maintain an institution that does not require excessive government regulation and succeed in this globalized environment.

References

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