

## **Content Analysis of Community College Strategic Plans**

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Elements of strategic planning include reviewing the community college mission statement, assessing institutional strengths and weaknesses, develop measurable goals and objectives that connect to organizational practice, link goals and objectives to funding, hold leaders accountable for achieving goals and objectives, integrate strategic enrollment management into the strategic plan, and provide professional development to help faculty and staff achieve the goals and objectives (Walters and McKay, 2005). Hamilton (2016) discussed visionary framing, step by step framing, and frame bridging as strategies for helping community college leaders achieve success of strategic plans. Hall and Lulich (2021) studied 52 US universities with high rankings from Times Higher Education or QS World rankings. Universities in the innovation group or middle group were more likely to use words like entrepreneur, innovation, and transformation than universities in the research or undergraduate education group, but less likely to use words like preservation or independence.

Selvitopu and Kaya (2020) analyzed strategic plans of Turkish public universities. Institutions were grouped into top institutions and bottom institutions based on criteria like citations and PhD students. Top institutions tended to be in larger cities whereas bottom institutions tended to be in smaller cities. The SWOT analysis for each institution was studied. Strengths of top universities included faculty collaboration and academic freedom, institutional culture, international collaborations, infrastructure, and alumni. Strengths of bottom universities included younger faculty members, support from the institution, and institutional communication. Weaknesses of top universities included lack of budget funds, too many students, and not enough faculty. Weaknesses of bottom universities included not enough faculty or staff, infrastructure, limited international collaborations, low enrollment, and limited alumni relations.

Williams (2021) proposed a model for strategic planning in higher education. In the brainstorming phase, leaders develop a long list of ideas. In the visioning phase, leaders take the list of ideas and reflect on where they would like to see the institution in the future. In the Action phase, stakeholders across the organization are engaged to extend the visioning ideas to develop proposals and ideas for new initiatives. In the results phase, a small strategy group takes the information collected in the previous stages and creates a strategic plan document that will be launched with the help of the institution's marketing department.

Özdem (2011) studied mission and vision statements of Turkish public universities and group them based on founding date. Mission and vision statements were analyzed using semantic content analysis. Four themes that emerged were the role of education and training, the role of research, the role of community service, and the importance of educating students to create a high-quality workforce. Developing a high-quality workforce was the most common theme in mission

statements while education and training was the least common theme. Community service as well as training and education were more commonly found in the mission statements of newer universities while research was more commonly found in the mission statements of older universities. In vision statements, older universities emphasized research while newer universities emphasized training and education.

Bassa (2015) studied strategic plans of three colleges in Ethiopia. Respondents indicated low confidence in the presence of a strategic plan; stakeholder involvement in strategic plan development; identification of institutional strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; as well as activities that are aligned and prioritized based on institutional mission, vision, goals and objectives. Respondents indicated low confidence in communicating responsibility for strategic plan implementation to the staff, using systems for strategic plan implementation, operating in alignment with the strategic plan, assigning sufficient resources to strategic plan implementation, regularly updating the strategic plan at designated points in time.

Özdemir and Çakir (2021) focused on performance indicators of university strategic plans. Strategic plan dimensions studied included finance, stakeholders, learning and development, internal processes, education and research, and institutional image. Performance indicators for finance included ratios of project revenue to total income as well as the amount of income from student enrollment compared to total income. Performance indicators for stakeholders included alumni employment rates and stakeholder satisfaction survey data. Performance indicators for learning and development included international professional development activities for staff, students studying abroad, collaborations with other institutions, and entrepreneurship programs for students. Performance indicators for internal processes included student to faculty ratios, graduates per term, student participation in extracurricular activities, and accredited programs. Performance indicators for education and research included publications and other scholarly activities, university academic rankings, funded research projects, and research activities. Performance indicators for institutional image included faculty participating in international scholarly activities, international guest lecturers invited to campus, and international student population.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The work of community colleges includes preparing traditional and adult students for universities and the workforce. Community colleges offer associate's degrees for students that plan to transfer to universities as well as associate's degrees and certificates for students that plan to enter the workforce.

Higher education institutions develop strategic plans to address challenges and improve. Community college leaders must consider the unique needs of the students and communities they serve. While there has been some research on university strategic plans, there is not as much research on the themes of community college strategic plans. This study seeks to address this gap in the literature.

## Theoretical Framework and Methodology

This study utilized Lewin's (1947) Change Model as a theoretical framework. In this framework, unfreezing involves being inspired to change. Changing follows unfreezing. College strategic plans are typically frozen until institutions decide to update them (changing). After updates are made, colleges publish the strategic plans (refreezing). In order to create strategic plans that inspire people to make improvements, colleges need to be able to unfreeze, change, and then refreeze their strategic plans.

This sample includes community colleges in Texas. The method of analysis was content analysis of each institution's most recent strategic plan. The sample includes 50 public community colleges in Texas.

The following research questions were posed:

1. What are common themes in community college mission statements?
2. What are common themes in community college vision statements?
3. What are common themes in community college values?
4. What are common themes in community college goals?

## Results

*What are common themes in community college mission statements?* Twelve (24%) of the community colleges mentioned student success in the mission statement. Eleven (22%) of the community colleges mentioned learning as a value. Thirteen (26%) of the community colleges mentioned quality in the mission statement. Eleven (22%) of the community colleges mentioned workforce development in the mission statement. Ten (20%) of the community colleges mentioned community engagement in the mission statement. Ten (20%) of the community colleges mentioned diversity, equity, and inclusion in the mission statement. Results are shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1.** Number and Percent of Texas Community Colleges Including Themes in Strategic Plan Mission Statements

Theme	Number	Percent
Quality	13	26
Student Success	12	24
Workforce Development	11	22
Community Engagement	10	20
DEI	10	20
Affordability	5	10
Academic/Career Pathways	5	10
Affordability	5	10
Lifelong Learning	5	10
Access	4	8

Innovation	4	8
Student-Centered	4	8
Transfer	4	8
Economic Development	3	6
Learning	2	4
Efficiency	1	2
Financial Management	1	2
Institutional Excellence	1	2

*What are common themes in community college vision statements?* Eight (16%) of the community colleges mentioned student success in the vision statement. Eleven (22%) of the community colleges mentioned economic or workforce development in the vision statement. Nine (18%) of the community colleges mentioned community development in the vision statement. Results are shown in Figure 2.

*What are common themes in community college value statements?* Eleven (22%) of the community colleges mentioned respect as a value. Fourteen (28%) of the community colleges mentioned collaboration as a value. Twelve (24%) of the community colleges mentioned initiative/accountability as a value. Ten (20%) of the community colleges mentioned access as a value. Twenty-one (42%) of the community colleges

**Figure 2. Number and Percent of Texas Community Colleges Including Themes in Strategic Plan Vision Statements**

Theme	Number	Percent
Economic/Workforce Development	11	22
Student Success	8	16
Community Development	9	18
Innovation	6	12
Quality	6	12
DEI	5	19
Completion	3	6
Lifelong Learning	3	6
Student Centered	3	6
Affordability/Value	2	4
Economic Mobility	2	4
Human Resources	1	2
Leadership	1	2
Performance	1	1

mentioned diversity, equity, and inclusion as a value. Sixteen (32%) of the community colleges mentioned student success as a value. Sixteen (32%) of the community colleges mentioned

innovation as a value. Thirteen (26%) of the community colleges mentioned excellence as a value. Eleven (22%) of the community colleges mentioned learning as a value. Sixteen (32%) of the community colleges mentioned integrity as a value. Results are shown in Figure 3.

**Figure 3.** *Number and Percent of Texas Community Colleges Including Themes in Strategic Plan Value Statements*

Theme	Number	Percent
DEI	21	42
Innovation	16	32
Integrity	16	32
Student Success	16	32
Collaboration	14	28
Excellence	13	26
Initiative/Accountability	12	24
Learning	11	22
Respect	11	22
Access	10	20
Community Engagement/Partnerships	8	16
Community	6	12
Quality	6	12
Service	6	12
Student Centered	6	12
Human Resources	4	8
Affordability	3	6
Stewardship	3	3
Commitment	2	4
Communication	2	4
Continuous Improvement	2	4
Financial Management	2	4
Performance Excellence/Effectiveness	2	4
Data-Driven Decision-Making	1	2
Dedication	1	2
Ethics	1	2
One College	1	2
Positivity	1	2
Trust	1	2

*What are common themes in community college strategic plan goals?* Thirty-eight (76%) of the community colleges mentioned student success as a goal. Nineteen (38%) of the community colleges mentioned completion as a goal. Thirteen (26%) of the community colleges mentioned enrollment as a goal. Eighteen (36%) of the community colleges mentioned financial management as a goal. Thirteen (26%) of the community colleges mentioned facilities as a goal. Twenty-eight

(56%) of the community colleges mentioned community engagement as a goal. Fifteen (30%) of the community colleges mentioned human resources as a goal. Twelve (24%) of the community colleges mentioned diversity, equity, and inclusion as a goal. Sixteen (32%) of the community colleges mentioned workforce or economic development as a goal. Twelve (24%) of the community colleges mentioned resource allocation as a goal. Results are shown in Figure 4.

**Figure 4. Number and Percent of Texas Community Colleges Including Themes in Strategic Plan Goals**

Theme	Number	Percent
Student Success	38	76
Community Engagement	28	56
Completion	19	38
Financial Management	18	36
Workforce/Economic Development	16	32
Human Resources	15	30
Enrollment	13	26
Facilities	13	26
DEI	12	24
Resource Allocation	12	24
Career Development	9	18
Instructional Innovation	9	18
Performance Excellence	9	18
Access	8	16
Efficiency	8	16
Quality	8	16
New/Aligned Programs/Pathways	7	14
Transfer	7	14
Retention	5	10
Sustainability	5	10
Accreditation	4	8
Branding/Marketing	3	6
Continuous Improvement	3	6
Data-Driven	3	6
Advising	2	4
Economic Mobility	2	4
High Schools	2	4
Initiative/Accountability	2	4
Learning	2	4
One College	2	4
Student-Focused	2	4
Alumni Engagement	1	2
Bachelor's Degrees	1	2

College Legacy	1	2
Community	1	2
Persistence	1	2
Strategic Enrollment Management	1	2

## Conclusion

This study addresses a gap in the literature regarding community college strategic plans. Understanding what community colleges include in strategic plans increases knowledge of higher education leadership. The strategies mentioned above can help community colleges increase effectiveness of their strategic plans. Future studies might investigate the process of strategic plan development at community colleges and the perspectives of stakeholders involved in strategic plan development. Future studies might also examine the implementation of these strategic plans.

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