

**STRATEGIC PLANNING AT TC3
BRIEF HISTORY, CURRENT STATE, LOOKING FORWARD
FEBRUARY 10, 2015**

INTRODUCTION

At the *Welcome Back to the Spring Semester* meeting on January 15, I highlighted a need for us as a College community to begin a yearlong strategic planning process. This report is intended to elaborate on the points made in those remarks and to further outline a more detailed process for undertaking this important initiative.

The Faculty/Staff survey completed in the spring of 2014 provided much feedback that assists our various departments in their respective planning and activities in support of our College-wide goal of Student Success. While much was of value (both affirming our work and highlighting need for adjustments) two particular results are germane to this report: 1) more than 90% of our faculty and staff continue to believe that they are responsible for student success, and 2) we noticed a decline in the portion of faculty and staff who feel connected to our planning and budgeting processes. Few faculty and staff indicated that they felt able to participate in the budget process or to have their department needs known. And few felt that they understand how institutional priorities are determined.

The strength of our College community's commitment to Student Success is indeed vital as we continue to look forward and address our many challenges. And the sense of disconnection to our planning and budgeting process is somewhat understandable. As our revenues have continued to erode in recent years, resulting in a need to reduce most areas of our overall budget, we have taken a somewhat pragmatic approach by simplifying the budget process in particular. This likely led to the unintended consequence of this sense of disconnection on the part of many.

Additionally, we have had many leave the College in the past five years due to retirement and other reasons. While not all of these positions have been filled, there nevertheless are many new employees at the College who were not with us at the time of previous planning discussions. Therefore they understandably are less familiar with our planning model and approach. This led me to a series of discussions with the Executive Council of how best to engage our College community in a meaningful strategic planning process that does not feel overwhelming at a time when most of us already feel challenged by our workloads.

A LISTENING TOUR: PURPOSE AND DESIRED OUTCOME

As I mentioned in the *Welcome Back* meeting, my goal is to complete a listening tour of the College community during the Spring Semester. For the most part this will be accomplished by a series of 90-minute meetings with people in their existing work groups, councils, departments, etc. Cathy will accompany me to record notes, and one or two members of the Executive Council will join me when their schedules permit. I'll expand on this part of the process and what will follow this first phase later in this report.

There are three broad goals or desired outcomes of this first phase of this process as it relates to our strategic planning:

- 1) To inform and/or remind all of us of TC3's Strategic Planning approach and, specifically, key aspects of our current planning model. This will be accomplished by means of what follows in this report and any clarification necessary prior to or during the listening tour meetings.
- 2) To gather feedback on our current Mission, Vision, Values, as well as our Continuing Goal and the key strategic components that contribute to its achievement. Again, this will be further detailed later in this report.
- 3) To obtain feedback on the need to more precisely define benchmarks for our Continuing Goal of Student Success. The need, I believe, is for us to set specific annual benchmarks to gauge our progress toward a 10-year goal for each of our three metrics (graduation rates; transfer rates, successful employment). I'm not proposing specific benchmark goals, nor do I intend to do so. I expect a committee, yet to be formed, to work on recommendations for this next Fall Semester – assuming there is general endorsement of this idea. During the listening tour there will be opportunity for people to offer pros and cons about the idea and any related feedback.

The following sections of this report contain additional background information: Brief historical summary of our strategic planning at TC3, explanation of our current planning model, a summary of the major challenges TC3 is facing (along with most other CC's), and additional detail on this process over the next 15 months.

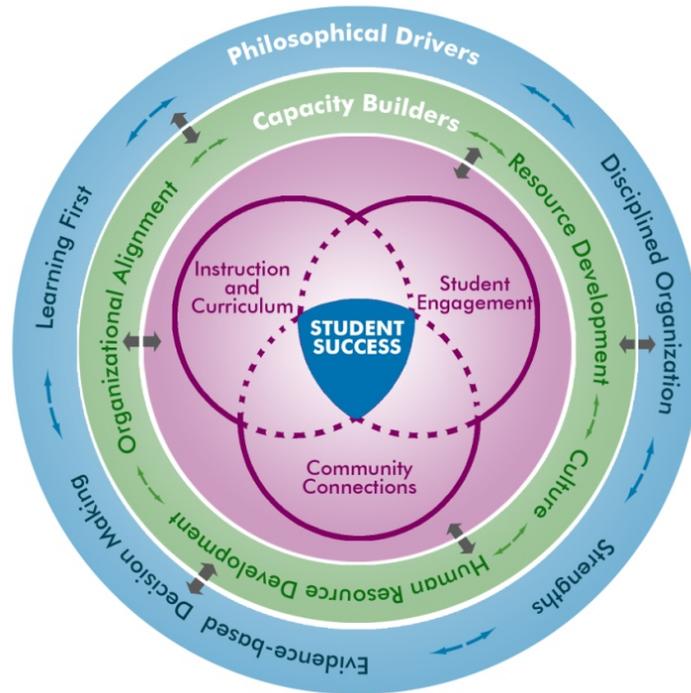
A BRIEF HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF STRATEGIC PLANNING AT TC3

Since 1996, the college's strategic focus has been on student learning, highlighting access and success. Our Mission, Vision, and Values statements have remained fairly consistent since that time (with some minor clarification and focusing in 2006), while our articulated goal statements have ranged from one to six. In each case, those goal statements have been focused on Student Learning/Success. In 2010, we again reframed our institutional goal to a single one, Student Success, and described three vital components of that success, inside and outside the classroom (Student Engagement, Instruction and Curriculum, and Community Connections). We recognize that all of the work across the College is intended to support student success, sometimes more obviously than others.

During the past twenty years, the dialogue related to our institutional success has shifted, both internally and externally, from a focus on access to a focus on completion and success. Our strategic planning has also reflected that in both the establishment of institutional priorities and the evidence we value to judge our work. The frameworks for our planning and assessment structures have also evolved from centralized to decentralized. While there has been variation in specific processes over the years, the principles have remained constant – to develop inclusive processes that begin with and support the planning and assessment done “on the ground” in each area of the College utilizing department plans, college-wide discussions, and broad representation on cross-functional college councils and committees, all focused on supporting the broad Student Success goal and metrics. I am proud that our planning and assessment processes have received very favorable reviews from Middle States in each of our last self-studies and periodic reviews. In fact, our most recent reports, in total, have been recommended as models for other colleges and universities.

OUR CURRENT PLANNING MODEL

In 2010 we also developed a graphic model (referred to as the “flywheel”) to illustrate this interrelationship of all of our work, whether or not providing direct student service:



Our current metrics for measuring student success are broad and include:

- Direct indicators of student success, e.g. graduation, transfer, employment
- Intermediate indicators (indicators that can lead to the ultimate outcome or increase the likelihood of it occurring), e.g. course and program learning outcomes, retention, maintenance of academic standards, developmental student success in college-level courses, increases in engagement and hope measures
- Initiative-specific measures, both formative and summative, e.g. Network Peer Mentor Program and Entry-level Advisement Processes

Attached is a more comprehensive description of our current planning model (pages 7-10) and our recently revised assessment model (page 11).

Ten years ago I challenged us all to “affirm our core values and clarify our hopes and dreams for the future of TC3 – defining a strategic intent to guide the building of our preferred future, a learning college that not only maximizes student learning, but that is also the kind of organization in which we want to work and dedicate our professional lives.”

- Do our current Mission, Vision, Values, and Goal statements continue to do that?
- Do our current planning framework and processes support our continuing to do that?

THE CHALLENGES: CURRENT AND EMERGING

During the past several years we have relied on Jim Collins work (*Good to Great*; and other subsequent books based on his ongoing research) to guide both our organizational and leadership development at the College. In his research on great organizations, one of the characteristics he highlights is the willingness to confront the “brutal facts” facing the organization. The following brutal facts are shared to inform the College community of factors that will likely have significant influence on all that we do during the next decade. Additionally, they provide important context for the discussions we will have around the campus during the spring semester.

- Declining state support for community colleges: In general, higher education is not a priority for taxpayer support. It hasn't been for several years, and there is no evidence that this will change in the foreseeable future. Though we received a small increase per FTE base aid last year, our state support is still \$178 below the rate in 2008-2009.
- Limited ability of county sponsors to increase support to make up for this decline in state support due primarily to state-imposed tax cap limitations.
- Three years of enrollment decline (at TC3, SUNY CC's, and around the country): Future competition for student enrollment will be increasingly severe.
- Various financial aid policy changes: These changes are negatively impacting many current/potential students' ability to attend college (both direct aid to students and more stringent limits on parent and student loans).
- Increased media attention on higher ed that calls into question the value of a college degree in terms of cost, debt load for students and parents, and the relevancy of the degree to employment opportunities. Additionally the definition of “value” is invariably purely economic. Few lawmakers or media members include in the definition of “value” the traditional emphasis on the intrinsic value of the college experience.
- Nontraditional postsecondary providers (including MOOCs) that are a competitive threat to our current CC programs, particularly in terms of time to degree and perceived employability.
- We're tied for #1 in SUNY for CC's tuition rate. Our ability to continue to rely on recent level of increases is very limited.
- Increased public support for Performance Based Funding (PBF) (some states – 100%), that could disrupt our current funding model. The Governor's proposal for CC funding for next year (2015-16) includes the following: “... 10 percent of Base Operating Aid for each college will be set aside and ultimately provided contingent upon the completion of a ‘Performance Improvement Plan’ approved by the (SUNY)Board of Trustees. Such a plan:
 - Will be used as the basis for performance funding allocations in future years.
 - Shall include, but not be limited to, metrics tracking the following:
 - Improving access, completion, academic and post-graduation success,
 - Job placement of graduates,
 - New programs and certifications aligned with the needs of local businesses, and,
 - Alignment with the Regional Economic Development Councils.”
- Increased public support for accountability/assessment in addition to what PBF may require.
- Increased demands (primarily SUNY, state, federal) for compliance reporting on just about everything we do, pulling resources from our core mission. My annual Compliance Report to the Board of Trustees in August 2014 provides a detailed list of current mandates and last year totaled 14 FTE staff time to comply.

- Increased public pressure for preparing students with job skills for immediate employment (as noted in the governor’s budget proposal).
- Increased use of technology:
 - Students who may have chosen TC3 because it was nearby now have other options, like Open SUNY and online programs from other institutions.
 - Technology is changing so fast we are having challenges keeping up the cost and training.
 - New technology like MOOCs could also present a change in the way students pursue their education.
 - Social media is another evolving technology that may impact the way we recruit and communicate with students.

PROCESS TO REENGAGE MEMBERS OF THE TC3 COMMUNITY TO OUR MISSION, VISION, VALUES, AND STRATEGIC FOCUS

Phase 1

In undertaking the listening tour briefly described above, I anticipate 12-15 meetings of not more than 20-25 people so as to maximize opportunity for discussion and comment. A comprehensive summary of the comments/feedback from all the sessions will be developed and shared with the College community. While I anticipate completing the listening tour during the spring semester, a summary report will be shared with the College community at the beginning of Fall 2015 semester.

Phase 2

To a large extent, what we do and how we approach this phase will depend on what we learn from Phase 1. We may need a representative group of faculty and staff to review the summary and develop recommendations for presentation to the College community. This will be particularly necessary if there seems to be widespread need to change aspects of our current model. Alternatively, the areas for needed change may be somewhat more narrowly focused (i.e. developing specific benchmarks for student success goal) with a smaller group tasked with developing appropriate recommendations. Target for Phase 2 completion is mid-spring semester of 2016. This timeframe corresponds to the work that will begin at that time on our next MSA Self Study that is due in 2018.

SUMMARY

In undertaking this process of discussing and modifying our Strategic Plan, I do so by stating my unwavering belief and faith in the faculty and staff of TC3 (probably not as often as I should). No community college president anywhere could be more proud of the dedication, commitment, and professionalism you all demonstrate daily in your respective responsibilities in serving our students.

Together we have faced unprecedented and extraordinary budget cuts and more recently enrollment declines. Yet (as documented above) your commitment to our students continues as strong as ever. You all, in various ways, continue to innovate and think creatively.

The examples are many but to highlight a few: Several offices and functions at the College engaged in lean office strategies to address staffing reductions and yet sustain or improve service to students; our facilities

and grounds are exceptionally well cared for, and often visitors will make unprompted remarks accordingly; faculty have embraced a wide range of new instructional methods in efforts to improve student's academic success; those involved in our academic support services continue to develop new or modified approaches, again to improve the student experience; all who are involved in our Student Life programs on campus are at the forefront of developing metrics for what students learn in their important out of classroom experiences.

I could have listed several specific examples of each area above but if you're still reading (and I sincerely hope you are) you'll agree this memo is already long enough.

In spite of the challenges mentioned above which are very real, I nevertheless remain excited about the future of TC3. The strengths, talents, and commitment to students you all demonstrate daily help us collectively to confront and prevail over these challenges and any others we may face in the future.

By engaging in this initiative of strengthening our Strategic focus as a College community we will continue to confront our challenges and thereby serve our students and our communities with excellence.



**Tompkins Cortland Community College
Strategic Planning and Assessment Framework**

Vision

To see strengths and unique potential in every person. To inspire people to make the courageous choice to learn, grow, and serve.

Mission

We serve our community by meeting educational needs, creating an environment for student success, and preparing our students and ourselves for citizenship in a global society.

Values

Learning

Learning is the most important outcome of our work. We are all learners and we know that teaching and learning happen both inside and outside the classroom. Each of us is responsible for our own learning and for supporting the learning of others.

Excellence

Exceptional teaching, programs, and service are critical to our success. We believe that excellence must be built on a foundation of integrity, honesty, and academic freedom. We achieve it by focusing on strengths, learning from experiences, and assessing our work.

Diversity

Diversity enriches our learning. We embrace diversity in all of its contexts, including strengths, perspectives, and people. We seek to increase our capacity to understand issues of difference, power, and privilege and to constructively resolve conflict.

Opportunity

Education transforms lives. We value access to education as a fundamental right. Our students can start here and go anywhere.

Innovation

Change creates vitality. We value active pursuit of thoughtful innovation and continuous improvement. We empower and challenge ourselves to create, innovate, take risks, and nurture an environment of trust.

Relationships

Relationships are the heart of our work. We value a caring, supportive community built on integrity, openness, honesty, and respect. Our internal and external relationships are flexible, collaborative, and interdependent.

Our Single Continuing Goal

Student Success – Our students succeed when they achieve their individual positive academic outcomes through dynamic integration of relevant, effective instruction and curricula, student engagement and community connections. These outcomes include completion of a degree or certificate, successful transfer, and new or enhanced employment.

Instruction and curricula that are relevant, effective and aligned with positive academic outcomes

Student Engagement evidenced by a high level of involvement in and enthusiasm for opportunities both inside and outside the classroom

Community Connections that build and maintain partnerships to support learning, cultivate resources, respond to local community needs and prepare students for citizenship in the global community

The three vital components are at the core of what we do as a College, and at their intersection is our single, unifying goal, student success. Inherent in each of these three components is the assumption that students learn and grow best when they are actively engaged in their learning and have a strong belief that the activities that lead to their learning are meaningful and important. To achieve our goal, we must engage students who are actively involved in both their own learning and the context in which it occurs. Those who do so are much more likely to achieve success than those who see learning as an isolated, largely passive enterprise. And we as an institution will create the conditions for that learning by eliminating the traditional barriers that have limited the interaction of these three vital components.

Student Success Assessment metrics include:

- Direct indicators of student success, e.g. graduation, transfer, employment
- Intermediate indicators (indicators that can lead to the ultimate outcome or increase the likelihood of it occurring), e.g. course and program learning outcomes, retention, maintenance of academic standards, developmental student success in college-level courses, increases in engagement and hope measures
- Initiative-specific measures, both formative and summative

Our Mission, Vision, Values and Goal statements define who we are and hope to be. We also look at our goal in relation to the capacity builders and philosophical drivers we use to achieve the goal, pursue our mission and vision and live our values.

Capacity Builders strengthen our organizational capacity and the systems necessary for student success:

- **Resource development** including funding, technology and physical infrastructure
- Development and maintenance of a **Culture** of learning based on an environment of mutual respect, collaboration, transparency, and trust
- **Human Resources Development** including professional and leadership development coupled with disciplined hiring and development practices
- **Organizational alignment** with our mission, vision, values and goal

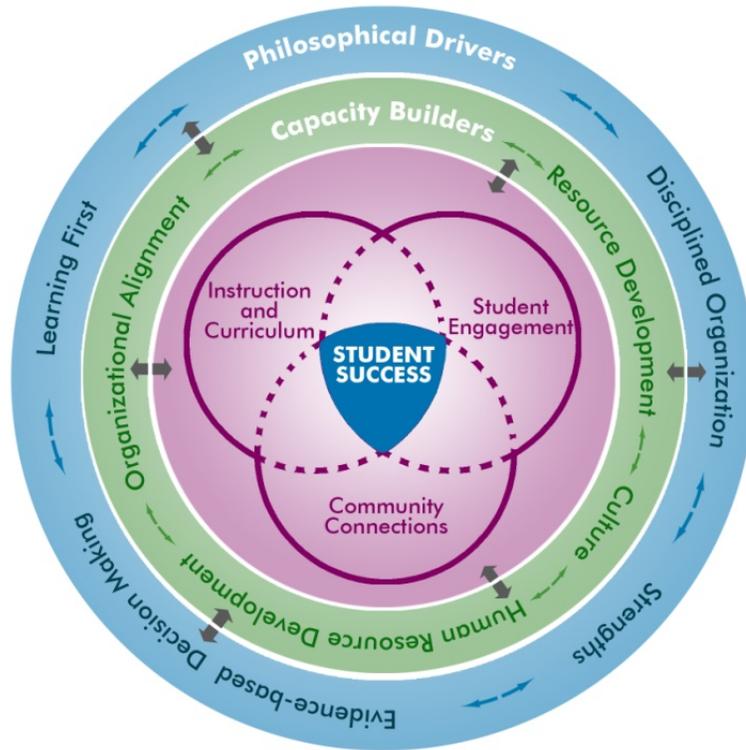
Beginning with the organizational restructuring implemented in 2008, we have engaged in processes that have enhanced our capacity to understand and address challenges and opportunities through coordinated efforts. In our organizational culture, we make information readily available and provide extensive opportunities for participation in discussion of key issues so that decisions may be made based upon deep and broad understanding. In developing our resources – financial, physical, and human – we work to align our systems and structures to work in collaboration both to reduce the waste of energy that results from internal struggles and to develop a culture that is truly supportive of student success.

Decisions, both large and small, about how we will provide those experiences, are framed by our **Philosophical Drivers:**

- **Learning First** in every decision, policy, program, and practice
- **Strengths**-based development for students and staff, individually and collectively
- Maintaining a **Disciplined Organization** in relation to our people, thoughts and actions
- **Evidence-based Decision Making** and a culture of assessment at all levels of the organization

Our philosophical drivers have supported the development of our capacity to build an institution dedicated to achieving student success. A disciplined organization such as ours bases decisions on evidence, but even more, strives to ensure that the evidence used is both thorough and germane to the decision to be made. By operating in such a disciplined manner, we can capitalize on both individual and collective strengths while also confining our actions to those that address our core concerns. That is, by keeping student learning and success at the heart of our decision-making, we are able to sort through the array of possible initiatives confronting us to choose those which are most consistent with the College's core philosophy.

Jim Collins, in his book *Good to Great*, uses the analogy of a flywheel to describe the “build-up to breakthrough” of organizations moving to greatness. There is no miracle moment or single defining action that creates the breakthrough, “each part of the system reinforces the other parts ... to form an integrated whole that is much more powerful than the sum of the parts,” and finally builds momentum to the point of breakthrough and maximum results. This “flywheel” graphic illustrates the interrelationship of all of our work across the college, whether or not providing direct student service:



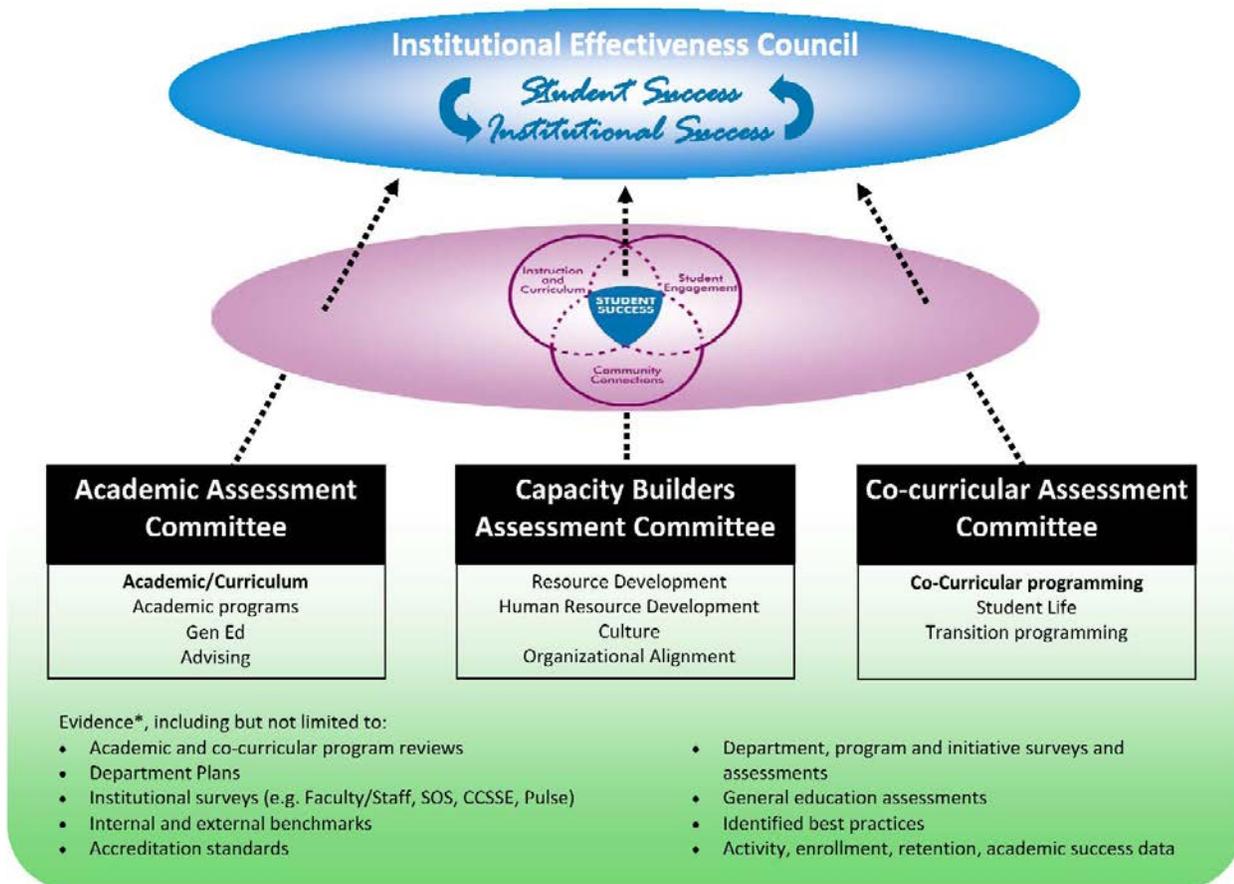
This planning framework is supported by multi-year institutional priorities coupled with departmental and cross-functional initiatives and annual planning and assessment.

The College has a long-standing dedication to meaningful data-informed assessment at all levels and all areas of the institution. All departments, functions and initiatives are engaged in annual planning and assessment to inform both their individual work and that of the college as a whole.

The Institutional Effectiveness Council and its three assessment committees are charged with our broader institutional assessment process. The committees and council assess broad indicators and provide feedback for improvement. Evidence is drawn from numerous sources, both internal and external, including, but not limited to:

- Periodic institution-wide surveys (e.g. CCSSE, SUNY Student Opinion Survey, Pulse survey, Faculty/Staff survey)
- Department plans
- Department, program, initiative and activity assessments
- General Education assessments
- Routinely available data analyses
- Custom data analyses
- Internal and external benchmarks and identified best practices
- Accreditation and certification standards

A broad overview of the institutional assessment structure is shown in the following graphic:



The Institutional Effectiveness Council oversees the assessment efforts of the three committees, and based upon their findings, makes recommendations to the Executive Council or other appropriate bodies for action. By keeping an eye on the entire assessment cycle and ensuring assessment evidence is acted upon, the IEC is charged with “closing the loop,” and making data driven institutional improvements.

The Council will also maintain a focus on the large-scale institutional level student success indicators that cut across functions at the College including direct measures of student success and intermediate institutional measures, e.g. retention, engagement and enrollment.