

MARCH 9 PAN-COLLEGE CONVENING ON STRATEGIC PLANNING

Synthesis of Breakout Discussion Notes

March 29, 2022

Pan-College Convening Logistics

The March 9, 2022 Pan-College Convening on MICA's Strategic Plan had robust attendance by MICA standards, consistent with previous Pan-College Convenings in terms of size and constituency spread. There were 133 rsvp's from 107 staff, 16 faculty, 5 students, and 5 trustees. Approximately 110 (83%) actually attended with all the campus constituency groups represented.

The Convening opened with [an overview of the strategic planning process and a preliminary report on the SMART Objectives Prioritization Survey administered in February 2022](#). While all objectives received some community support, the survey clearly revealed five top priorities:

- Affordability
- Workplace Systems & Culture
- Finance
- Educational Relevance
- Campus Teamwork for Student Success

The Convening participants then took part in two consecutive breakout discussions with differently mixed constituency members. There were 10 small groups for each discussion, with an assigned facilitator and a volunteer notetaker.

Participants in the first breakout session were asked to select 1-2 topics from the top five survey priorities above, discuss, and report out the key points of their discussion:

- "Where are the gaps?"
- "What are the key strategies or actions to close the gaps?"

Participants then gathered for the second breakout session to select 1-2 topics from the top five survey priorities above, discuss, and report out the key points of their discussion:

- "What are the most important results that demonstrate the success of these priorities?"
- "How can each constituency contribute to the success in the chosen priority areas?"

Synthesis of Breakout Discussion Notes

Below is a synthesis of the notes from both breakout discussion sessions*. Please note that the groups' conversations addressed topics in overlapping ways, which poses a challenge to easy categorization. Consequently, some gaps, strategies, actions, etc. have been consolidated as appropriate. Because the original notes are hard to navigate, their documents are archived but not posted; queries can be sent to strategicplan@mica.edu.

Four out the five priority topics revealed by the survey were selected by the groups for discussion. The synthesized discussion notes* are shared here in the order of number of groups engaged for a topic.

**Note: A post-event survey was posted online to receive additional input through March 15. A few responses were submitted and are reflected in this synthesis.*

Priority: Obj. L + Obj. M – Workplace Systems & Culture (selected by 8 groups)

Gaps

- Inadequate employee retention
 - Lack of professional development, esp. for mid-career staff
 - Inequitable compensation
 - Burnout, low morale
 - Inadequate support for staff who interface with students
 - Loss of institutional memory
- Low job satisfaction
 - Admin/support staff feel unheard, do not have access to career advancement opportunities
 - Employees' experience and expertise are not adequately valued or recognized
- Lack of campus-wide expectations and systems
 - Individual departments and employees create heterogeneous systems for reporting, performance evaluation, project/task management, budgeting, application processes, documentation, roles and responsibilities, scheduling
- Power disparities/silos
 - Power struggles/imbances between faculty and staff, among departments, between faculty/staff and administration
 - Different approaches to governance among students, staff, and faculty
 - Faculty/staff dissatisfaction with top-down power structure
- Inadequate communication
 - Lack of understanding of roles, structures across faculty and staff divisions; lack of clarity about how decisions are made
 - Lack of follow-up/follow-through on policy/procedure recommendations
- Lack of change readiness and need of change management
 - Change is inevitable but hard for incumbents, especially in stressful times

Strategies/Actions

- Increase employee retention
 - Greater investment in professional development
 - Appropriate compensation and recognition of work/accomplishments
 - Ability for faculty and staff to take classes
 - Clear pathways for career advancement within MICA

- Equitable means of appreciation and support for staff and faculty
- Clarification of employees' understanding of connections among goals, outcomes, and rewards
- Provide management training for supervisors and as a means of professional development
- Create many paths for advancement
- Reconsider positions and roles based on departmental needs
- Opportunities for faculty and staff to engage in professional development and/or classes together
- Implement campus-wide expectations and systems
 - Adopt common procedures and software platforms (e.g. Asana, Trello, etc.) for reporting, performance, project/task management, budgets, decision-making processes, application processes, documentation, roles, scheduling, etc.
 - Make better use of existing systems, e.g. Workday
 - Implement change management campus-wide
- Address power imbalances/break down silos
 - Create more cross-functional teams to collaborate on common challenges and find solutions and efficiencies
 - Facilitated conversations to increase understanding between faculty and staff
 - Implement ways to identify and leverage expertise of staff, faculty, students, and alumni
 - Improve communication between administration and staff to address grievances
 - Establish and formalize a staff senate
 - Identify units with high satisfaction and replicate their practices; identify units with low satisfaction and draw lessons
 - Cross-campus brainstorming opportunities through in-person lunches, zoom coffees, combined FEC/SEC/SVA meetings
- Improve communication
 - Adopt central repository for institutional data and information-sharing
 - Increase transparency in decision-making processes
 - Better communication about compensation strategy
 - Produce campus organizational chart
 - Hold department open houses
 - Update employee list on website
 - Create searchable database for equity and institutional memory purposes

Priority: Obj. D – Affordability (selected by 5 groups)

Gaps

- Tuition & fee structure results in losing students and preventing enrollment by students who want to attend MICA but cannot afford it, esp. underrepresented populations
 - Inability to fulfill thrive with Baltimore promise

- Fees are untenable for students, e.g. fees for course materials, orientation, enrollment, housing
- Competing against schools that offer tuition remissions and stipends
- Inequitable earning potential between graduates who are prepped for nonprofit careers vs. those prepped for corporate careers
- Tension between lowering costs for students and retaining faculty and staff
 - Lack of strategy/clear communication about ways to resolve this tension
- Competition for resources among departments

Strategies/Actions

- Reduce tuition costs/freeze costs for students once they are at MICA
- Build capacity in Financial Aid to build trust with and support students throughout their time at MICA
- Improve strategies to encourage alumni to give back, e.g., to endowment
- Establish variable tuition for graduate programs
- Study how other colleges are addressing cost/affordability challenges
- Identify efficiencies and opportunities for streamlining and innovation, e.g., lots of speaker events, but unclear what they add up to
- Invest in alumni and cultivate them as fundraisers
- Integration of career development within the classroom

Priority: Obj. C – Campus Teamwork for Student Success (selected by 2 groups)

Gaps

- Lack of coordination among departments, resulting in duplication of effort
- Lack of knowledge about what different divisions do, resulting in a gap of knowledge; high turnover contributes to this gap
- Limited student access to campus resources and facilities across departments
- Hiring based on individual offices and divisions, not the institution as a whole
- Director-level employees have little agency
- Not enough support for alumni, resulting in alumni being insufficiently engaged as donors; partly due to lack of staff capacity

Strategies/Actions

- Right sizing - find efficiencies and make better use of existing capacity
- The success of the institution is measured by the students' and graduates' financial/professional health and their ability to give back
- Professional development for students
- Question “endless growth” model
- Re-examine whether graduate students may teach undergraduate
- Facilitate faculty-staff collaboration across Undergraduate Studies and Graduate Studies
- Get a better sense of institutional capacity, enrollment plateau
- Define “collaboration” in a way that is commonly understood across divisions
- Expand opportunities for members of the campus community to connect across constituencies, e.g. artist talks, workshops, social events

Priority: Obj. A – Educational Relevance (selected by 1 group)

Gaps

- Lack of communication and tools needed to support existing academic programs
- Confusion among students about what they're learning and why

Strategies/Actions

- Improve alignment of Institutional Learning Outcomes with professional development goals & other learning outcomes
- Improve communication with students; ask sophomores about their interests; ask students why they stay; keep students informed about the support available to them beyond their first year
- Improve collection of data about post-graduation success, return on investment, comparison of persistence rates & graduation rates
- Compare to industry standards/benchmarks

Results that Demonstrate Success

- Increased job satisfaction
- Increased career mobility
- Increased employee retention/longevity
- Improved information-sharing
- Improved collaboration among departments and employees
- Improved shared governance
- Decreased institutional dependence on tuition
- Initiative-by-initiative comparison to industry benchmarks
- Shared understanding of what success means for each department/college as a whole
- Robust endowment
- Increased student retention (persistence & graduation rates)
- Increased enrollment of 1st-generation students, students from Baltimore City
- Increased engagement of, and giving by, alumni

Benchmarks

- Competitive compensation structure
- Increased opportunities for job advancement
- Increased opportunities for cross-department/cross-functional collaboration
- PBC-defined requirements for employees to participate in cross-departmental collaborations
- Promotion of cross-campus / cross-institution collaborations and opportunities
- Increased participation in surveys, campus events, etc. by employees at all levels, incl. managers
- Increased revenue from fundraising
- Improved shared governance practices
- Increased career readiness among graduates
- Increased grant funding of faculty, staff, & student initiatives

How Each Constituency Can Contribute

- Employees as ambassadors for MICA
- Trustee focus is on what each of us can do in the interest of shared governance
- Looking into ways to get more contact with faculty, staff and students, and to get representatives for each group
- Only so much we can do as individual constituency groups; upper admin needs to be involved or allow more input
- More involvement in fundraising across constituencies, including more support in identifying and accessing grant/funding opportunities
- Regular reports on financial health of institution, both campuswide and by department, including available funding opportunities
- Include students in notifications of funding and research opportunities
- Map out life cycle of student success, including professional development
- Students should play greater role in decision-making

Additional Food for Thought

- Concern that strategic plan goals are more aspirational than realistic
- Need to identify both quantitative and qualitative benchmarks
- Hard to create cross-functional constituencies without a top down approach
- New developments and change require time to implement appropriately