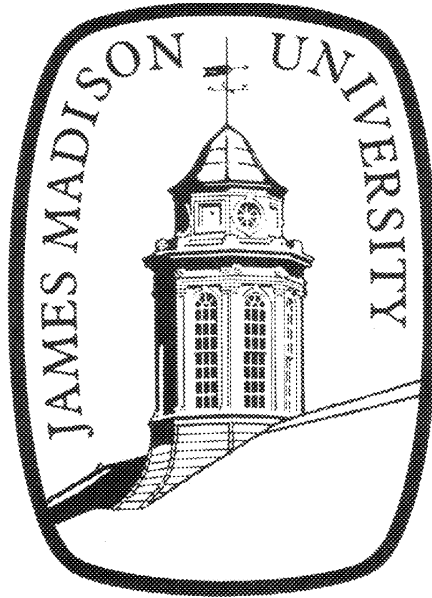


# JMU Planning Process Evaluation



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## Introduction

James Madison University instituted a formal planning process many years ago. Single and multi-year objectives have been developed for more than 15 years. Concerns have been expressed, however, that the planning process could be more inclusive and that it should be better publicized to the university community. In 1993 President Carrier created a task force on planning to develop recommendations for improving JMU's planning process. Several of the recommendations that resulted from the taskforce are summarized below.

- Create and disseminate a "Master Calendar" of major external and internal planning and budget deadlines.
- Take a more proactive approach in educating members of the university community about planning and budget issues, purposes and processes.
- Explore and develop different communication strategies to create expanded opportunities for more members of the university community to become informed about planning and budget issues.
- Provide timely feedback to those involved in the planning and budget processes regarding how their input was used.
- Create more standardized methods across divisions that will provide opportunities for involvement.
- Utilize assessment results in planning endeavors.
- Adjust the timetable for the Master Plan to reflect a completion date at the end of Spring Semester.

Based upon these recommendations JMU instituted in 1995 a revised planning process. The major purposes of this new process are to encourage systematic planning across the university, encourage staff to become involved in the development of the Master Plan, and to improve communication amongst the university community about the planning process.

## SACS Criteria for Accreditation

The planning process is designed to be consistent with the requirements of the *Criteria for Accreditation*<sup>1</sup> of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

*The institution **must** have an appropriate plan, as well as a functioning planning and evaluation process, which identifies and integrates projected educational, physical and financial development, and incorporates procedures for program review and institutional improvement.*

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<sup>1</sup> *Criteria for Accreditation*. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. 1995.

*An institution **must** study periodically its statement of purpose, considering internal changes as well as the changing responsibilities of the institution to its constituencies. . . . Consequently, the institution **must** demonstrate that its planning and evaluation processes, educational programs, educational support services, financial and physical resources, and administrative processes are adequate and appropriate to its stated purpose.*

*In addition to providing evidence of planning and evaluation in its educational program, the institution **must** demonstrate planning and evaluation in its administrative and educational support services. For each administrative and educational support service unit, the institution **must***

- 1. establish a clearly defined purpose which supports the institution's purpose and goals,*
- 2. formulate goals which support the purpose of each unit,*
- 3. develop and implement procedures to evaluate the extent to which these goals are being achieved in each unit,*
- 4. use the results of the evaluations to improve administrative and educational support services.*

*Each unit, in its planning and evaluation processes, should consider internal and external factors and should develop evaluation methods that will yield information useful to the planning processes of that unit.*

### **Evaluation Focus**

It is essential to focus the evaluation on the most important aspects of a program. The evaluation of the JMU planning process focuses on the following major concerns about the process:

- Knowledge of the Master Plan
- Consistency of objectives and the Priorities for Action
- Involvement of staff in the planning process
- Use of Master Plan results for program improvement

This report is a summary of the findings of the evaluation conducted during 1996-97. The report contains background information about university and college planning, the methodology employed in the evaluation, a summary of the results, and conclusions and recommendations. The appendices contain the program design and evaluation design for the JMU planning process.

### **Selected Background Information on College and University Planning**

The literature on planning in higher education is extensive, and it is impossible to adequately summarize it in this document. However, there are some commonalities that can provide insight into the focus and structure of the JMU planning process as well as highlight some directions for the evaluation design.

Planning can take many forms ranging from short- or long-term operational planning to strategic planning that focuses on the "major strategic decisions facing the organization."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Norris, D. and Poulton, N. *A Guide for New Planners*, Ann Arbor, Michigan: The Society for College and University Planning, 1991.

Each type of planning involves a different orientation, nature of information, information system focus, and decision support.

Despite the fact that planning activities can take many forms for many different reasons, there are some common characteristics. Below is a summary of some of the most important elements of a useful planning process.

### **Characteristics of Planning**

- Planning is a basic responsibility of all leaders and managers. It should occur at all levels of the organization.
- Planners should encourage "planning oriented behavior" on the part of institutional citizens.
- Planning must pay attention to the timeframes, cycles, and sequences of institutional life.

### **Linking Strategic Thinking and Organizational Planning:**

The *Guide for New Planners* also discusses linking strategic thinking and organizational planning. Below are some of the key hints about activities that can work in many situations.

- "Use small, cross-disciplinary work groups to generate strategies and implications for implementation.
- Use environmental scanning to search out the emerging issues and challenges that require changes in strategy.
- Convert environmental-scanning insights into easily understood expressions of their impact on tactical and operational planning.
- Generate a simple clear 'vision of the organization of the future'.
- Demonstrate a willingness to modify and tinker with established plans as new strategies emerge.
- Provide a clear statement of strategic vision and the impact of strategies on different stakeholders.
- Have a strategic-thinking group review summaries of tactical plans for consonance with institutional strategies."

### **Implications for the Evaluation**

The literature review suggests some areas of evaluation concern. First, the characteristics of planning suggest that the evaluation ought to focus on the involvement of all persons in planning and whether planning behavior is emphasized. Second, it suggests that there should be linkages between the operational objectives in the Master Plan and the more strategic Priorities for Action. Third, there should be widespread knowledge about the planning process.

### Methodology

This evaluation of the JMU planning process employs the Discrepancy Evaluation Model developed by the late Dr. Malcolm Provus of the University of Virginia. Discrepancy evaluation involves the comparison of performance (P) with a standard (S). The development of useful evaluation first involves a thorough description of the program to be evaluated. Appendix A contains the program design for JMU's planning process. The program design contains information about the resources (inputs), activities (processes), and expected outcomes (outputs) for the JMU planning process. The evaluation design, contained in Appendix B, describes how the evaluation is related to the most important aspects of the planning process.

The evaluation of the JMU planning process emphasizes the collection of information relating to the major evaluation concerns. Two efforts were undertaken to address these concerns. The first effort involved an examination by the JMU Planning Advisory Council of the consistency of the objectives and the Priorities for Action. The second effort involved surveying a random sample of all full-time faculty, administrators, and staff to solicit information about knowledge of the Master Plan, involvement in the planning process, and use of results for program improvement.

The examination of the consistency of the objectives and the Priorities for Action involved a review by the Planning Advisory Council of the objectives prior to the publication of the Master Plan in March. Since the Master Plan could not be published unless there was agreement about the consistency and appropriateness of the objectives, an examination of the vote of the PAC members will be the standard for determining if this objective was met.

The survey was distributed to 338 randomly selected full-time faculty, staff, administrators, and administrative support staff. One hundred seventy-one surveys (50.6 percent) were completed. An analysis of those who returned the surveys indicates that the results are more generalizable to administrative staff members and faculty than classified staff. It is also clear that some staff members were unclear about the administrative category on the survey and said they were administrators or administrative support \*. Administrative support is defined as those in T&R administrative positions whose activities are supportive. Examples of this type are librarians and academic advisors.

EMPLOYEE TYPE	NUMBER AND PERCENT ** SURVEYED		NUMBER AND PERCENT ** RESPONDING		PERCENT OF EMPLOYEE TYPE RESPONDING
	N	PCT	N	PCT	
Administrators and administrative support	28	8.3	* 30	18.5	107.1
Classified staff	187	55.3	46	28.4	24.6
Faculty	123	36.4	86	53.0	69.9
Total	338	100.0	162	100.0	
Staff type not given			12		
Grand Total ***	338	100.0	171	50.6	

\*\* This is the percent of the total staff surveyed. The percentage of administrators and administrative support staff (8.3 percent) is calculated by dividing 28 into 338.

\*\*\* The percentages in this row represent the total staff surveyed and those who responded. The percent responding (50.6 percent) is calculated by dividing 171 by 338.

## Results

The results of this evaluation relate the guiding evaluation concerns and questions to the findings of the study.

### Evaluation Concern 1: Knowledge of the Master Plan

- Are faculty, staff, and administrators aware the Master Plan has been completed and published?
- What are the most effective ways to communicate with staff about the Priorities for Action and the Master Plan?
- Do all staff members know the trends that were listed in the Master Plan as being critical to the future of JMU?
- Do all staff members read the Priorities for Action for JMU?

One of the major objectives of the revised planning process is to effectively communicate with all staff about the major planning activities at JMU. It is very important that staff members know that the Master Plan was published. Table 1 shows that approximately half of the staff members at JMU know that the Master Plan was published in late March. An analysis of the response by employee type indicates that administrators and administrative support staff are much more likely (83 percent) to know about the publication of the Master Plan than either faculty (51percent) or classified staff (36 percent).

Each staff member was asked to state the most effective ways to communicate with him or her. Table 2 shows that electronic mail is the most effective means to communicate with staff, followed by memorandum and staff meetings. These were the preferred means across all staff types.

Table 1  
Knowledge of the Publication of the Master Plan

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENT OF CASES
Yes	81	47.4
No	90	52.6
Total	171	100.0

Table 2  
Most Effective Means to Communicate about the Planning Process

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENT OF CASES
Electronic mail	135	79.4
Memorandum to departments	78	45.9
Staff or faculty meetings	53	31.2
JMU <i>Extra</i> or <i>The Breeze</i>	43	25.3
PAC home page	20	11.8
Other means	10	5.9

Table 3  
 Knowledge of the Planning Process  
 Staff Who Have Read the Following Sections of the Master Plan

RESPONSE	NUMBER	PERCENT OF CASES
Planning model description	31	38.3
Major environmental trends	29	35.8
Priorities for Action	43	53.1
Objectives relating to 1996-97 Priorities for Action	40	49.4

Staff members were asked to state which sections of the Master Plan they had read. Table 3 shows that of those who had read the Master Plan more than half had read the Priorities for Action and slightly less than half had read the objectives. If less than 50 percent of staff have read the Master Plan, however, then only about 25 percent of all staff appear to be knowledgeable of the Priorities for Action and the objectives that relate to the Priorities for Action.

**Evaluation Concern 2: Consistency of Objectives and Priorities for Action**

- Do all objectives under each Priority for Action relate to that Priority?
- Are there any major objectives missing from the Master Plan?

Every fall each division must develop Action Plans that relate to the Priorities for Action. The Planning Advisory Council reviews the Action Plans for comprehensiveness and congruence with the Priorities for Action. The PAC approved the Master Plan in March 1997, thereby indicating that the document was acceptable.

**Evaluation Concern 3: Involvement in the Planning Process**

- Do departmental objectives contain the recommendations of staff from the department?
- Do all staff members know the objectives that relate specifically to their area?

Another major objective of the planning process is to encourage all staff to make recommendations through their supervisors for objectives to include in the Master Plan. Four questions in the survey address the concerns about input to the Master Plan and knowledge of objectives that relate to the staff completing the survey.

Table 4 shows the number and percentage of staff who were specifically asked by their supervisor or department head to suggest recommendations for the objectives in the Master Plan. Less than 40 percent of staff reported they were asked specifically to make recommendations for objectives in the Master Plan. Administrative staff members were the most likely to make recommendations, followed by faculty and classified staff.

Table 4  
Made Recommendations for Objectives in the Master Plan

RESPONSE	NUMBER	VALID PERCENT
Yes	65	38.2
No	105	61.8
Total	170	100.0
Missing	1	

A pamphlet was distributed through the departments to all staff about the Priorities for Action. Table 5 shows the number and percentage of staff who reported that their supervisor or department head discussed the pamphlet with them. Slightly more than 20 percent discussed the pamphlet about the Priorities for Action with their supervisor or department head. Administrative staff members were far more likely to have discussed the pamphlet (43 percent) than were faculty (14 percent) or classified staff (17 percent).

Table 5  
Supervisor or Department Head Discussed Priorities for Action Pamphlet

RESPONSE	NUMBER	VALID PERCENT
Yes	35	20.6
No	135	79.4
Total	170	100.0
Missing	1	

Table 6 shows how staff responded when asked to state whether they had read the objectives for their department in the Master Plan or some other document. Forty-five percent of staff members have read these objectives. The percentages across staff type were similar with the highest percentage being administrative staff (53 percent).

Table 6  
Read the Objectives for Own Department

RESPONSE	NUMBER	VALID PERCENT
Yes	77	45.3
No	93	54.7
Total	170	100.0
Missing	1	

**Evaluation Concern 4: Use of Master Plan Results**

- Have evaluation strategies been developed for each objective in the Master Plan?
- Are staff aware that an annual report is due regarding the objectives?  
Are findings used for program improvement?

Table 7 shows how staff responded when asked if they knew how the objectives for their area or department within their division that related specifically to them would be evaluated. Only 21 percent indicated that they knew how the objectives would be evaluated. Administrative staff members again were the most likely to know how the objectives will be evaluated.

Table 7  
Know How Objectives Will Be Evaluated

RESPONSE	NUMBER	VALID PERCENT
Yes	35	20.8
No	133	79.2
Total	168	100.0
Missing	3	

Table 8 shows how staff responded when asked how frequently they were reminded during the year that their area or department needed to complete the objectives in the Master Plan. Less than 40 percent said they had been reminded at least one time. Administrative staff members (53 percent) were more likely to be reminded at least one time of the need to complete the objectives than were faculty (40 percent) or classified staff (37 percent).

Table 8  
Number of Times Reminded about Objectives

RESPONSE	NUMBER	VALID PERCENT
None	101	61.2
1 to 5 times	61	37.0
More than 5 times	3	1.8
Total	165	100.0
Missing	6	

Table 9 shows how staff responded when asked whether they know who is responsible for accomplishing each objective in the Master Plan. Slightly more than 30 percent know who is responsible. Administrative staff members (45 percent) were more likely to know who is responsible than were faculty (26 percent) or classified staff members (29 percent).

Table 9  
Know Who is Responsible for the Accomplishment of Each Objective  
in the Master Plan

RESPONSE	NUMBER	VALID PERCENT
Yes	51	30.5
No	116	69.5
Total	167	100.0
Missing	4	

Staff members were asked how frequently the results of evaluation activities are used to improve their area. Table 10 shows that almost half felt that the results of evaluation activities are used frequently for program improvement. Like most of the previous questions, administrative staff members (52 percent) were more likely to believe that evaluation results were used frequently than were faculty (43 percent) or classified staff (43 percent).

Table 10  
Frequency of Use of Results of Evaluation Activities

RESPONSE	NUMBER	VALID PERCENT
Very frequently	13	8.8
Frequently	56	38.4
Seldom	48	32.9
Never	29	19.9
Total	146	100.0
Missing	25	

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The following major conclusions can be drawn from this evaluation of the JMU planning process:

- Approximately half of the full-time staff members at JMU know that the Master Plan was published in 1997. However, administrative staff members are far more likely to be aware of the document's existence than are faculty or classified staff members. No baseline data exist about how many staff members knew about the publication of previous Master Plan. However, this result could be seen as an improvement since the effort to communicate with staff members about the planning process has been much more extensive than in previous years.
- Electronic mail and memoranda are the best means for communicating with staff about the Master Plan. Other forms such as meetings, *The Breeze*, and the *JMU Extra* are also useful forms of communication. The PAC home page on the Campus Wide Information System can be a useful form of providing information to a wide variety of staff, but it is not a primary means for publicizing the existence of the documents.
- Based upon the fact that the Planning Advisory Council agreed to publish the Master Plan in March 1997, it appears that there is acceptable consistency between the objectives in the Master Plan and the Priorities for Action.
- Involvement in the planning process that relates to the Master Plan appears to be primarily isolated among administrative staff. Administrative staff members are far more likely to have made recommendations for objectives in the Master Plan, discussed the Priorities for Action with their supervisor, and read the objectives for their own department. This is not surprising given the fact that administrative staff members are primarily responsible for reporting on the accomplishment of the objectives.
- Administrative staff members primarily use the Master Plan. A small percentage of all staff know how the objectives will be evaluated, are reminded about the need to complete the objectives, know who is responsible for completing the objectives and believe

evaluation results are frequently used. Administrative staff members, however, are much more likely to respond affirmatively to these questions than are faculty and classified staff members.

Based on the findings of this evaluation, the following recommendations are offered for consideration:

- Multiple forms of communication should be used to inform staff of the planning process and the related documents. Additional efforts should be taken to communicate with faculty members and classified staff members.
- Increased efforts need to be made to involve faculty and classified staff in the planning process. It appears from the results of the survey that the planning process is viewed as an administrative function as opposed to an activity that should involve all members of the university community.
- These efforts to involve more faculty and classified staff should include educating everyone about the following:
  - How the objectives are developed,
  - Who is responsible for completing the objectives, and
  - Clearly defining how the objectives will be evaluated.
- Since less than half of the staff members believe that the results of evaluation activities are used for program improvement, efforts should be taken to educate staff members about how to use evaluation results and that documentation of the use of results should be expected.
- Acceptable standards for each evaluation question should be developed so that progress toward the accomplishment of the goals of the planning process can be monitored.

**Appendix A**  
**Program Design**



**Appendix B**  
**Evaluation Design**



**Appendix C**  
**Planning Process Evaluation Survey**