

NCCU Division of Academic Affairs

2016-2021 Academic Affairs Strategic Plan

Executive Summary

Academic Affairs Strategic Plan Update Committee
April 16, 2021

In September 2020 Interim Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Yolanda Banks Anderson appointed a committee of faculty and administrators with the charge to update the *2016-2021 Academic Affairs Strategic Plan* “to ensure congruency with the [2019-2024] University Strategic Plan and to ensure that it continues to be forward-looking and addresses the needs of the 21st Century Scholars.” The updated Academic Affairs Strategic Plan is to be submitted to the NCCU Board of Trustees at the November 2021 meeting. This report provides a review and subsequent recommendations for updating the *2016-2021 Academic Affairs Strategic Plan*.

Academic Affairs Vision

NCCU is the gateway to opportunity. The division of Academic Affairs will be a global leader in preparing a diverse student body for the opportunities and challenges of the 21st century.

Academic Affairs Mission

Academic Affairs prepares students to become visionary global leaders and innovative practitioners who transform communities by fostering a culture of inquiry, creativity, and discovery.

Background

In November 2014 Chancellor Debra Saunders-White “charged the provost and the academic team to develop a [five-year] strategic plan that will establish new academic directions and articulate an overall academic vision for North Carolina Central University for the next 5 years.” The planning committee assembled at the time worked over the subsequent year, which resulted in the *2016-2021 Academic Affairs Strategic Plan*. The five goals in the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan are 1) Teaching, Research and Scholarship; 2) Cross-disciplinary Education; 3) Innovation and Transformative Leadership; 4) Inclusive Culture, and 5) Community Engaged Campus.

An unrealized promise in that document was to develop reporting and accountability metrics for each element of this strategic plan. While the planning team delivered a complete plan, the intended implementation team was not assembled, leading to implementation stages left undeveloped. The strategic plan was to be monitored and benchmarked through a dashboard system, with priority, cost and timelines to be assigned to each strategy. An evaluation process using both qualitative and quantitative measures to assess the completion of each goal was intended to be developed. Unanticipated changes to the university’s leadership structure left this closing of the loop undeveloped.

Review Process

A significant disadvantage for the committee in completing this review was the lack of contemporaneous data and analysis specific to this Strategic Plan. The committee was able to collect documents from many of the Academic Affairs units and departments to conduct a post-hoc evaluation of this convenience sampling of activities, projects and reports. It is not a full representation of all actions and projects that the academic units and departments undertook to fulfill the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan during this period. The committee evaluated each document for evidence of objectives and strategies in the sample of reports. It did not evaluate the strength of the design and implementation of any given project.

Findings

Over the past five years, the North Carolina Central University Academic Affairs Strategic Plan has guided the institution in its academic endeavors utilizing a framework of five specific goals. The first of these strategic goals focuses on enhancing teaching, research, and scholarship among faculty. In pursuit of this goal, NCCU is transitioning to a research-driven institution while simultaneously elevating its status through a dedication to provide quality education. This goal embodies the Academic Affairs mission by preparing students to become “visionary global leaders and practitioners” poised to transform their communities by “fostering a culture of inquiry, creativity, and discovery.” Specifically, goal one of the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan supports the mission of the Division of Academic Affairs by promoting the core values of academic engagement and innovation and transformative leadership.

The second goal, cross-disciplinary education, embodies the core value of academic engagement through participating in collaborative learning opportunities and engaging in reflective learning. NCCU’s work in expanding cross-disciplinary teaching and learning is “[allowing] students to recognize the connections between seemingly unrelated subjects and [preparing] them to be competitive in a dynamic labor market.”

In the third goal, Innovation and transformative leadership, NCCU cultivates transformative leaders and problem solvers by encouraging creativity and intellectual growth. Through mentorship and collaboration, students explore opportunities that promote innovation and cultural responsibility. Strategic partnerships and initiatives promote entrepreneurship and encourage the commercialization of intellectual property. The Core Values for Goal 3 are Understanding cultural context, Respecting individuality, and Promoting inclusiveness.

The fourth goal the 2016-2021 Academic Affairs Strategic Plan focuses on diversity and inclusion. Specifically, the goal aims to “[c]reate an inclusive environment that promotes an understanding of diverse perspectives, respect for individuality and community, and the practice of cultural competence.” Finally, Goal 4 embodies the core values Understanding cultural context; Respecting individuality; and Promoting inclusiveness; Demonstrating social consciousness and engagement.

Through Goal 5, Community Engaged Campus, NCCU realizes the Academic Affairs mission to develop leaders prepared to advance the consciousness of social responsibility in a diverse,

global society. NCCU Academic Affairs operationalized and implemented the goal of promoting a community-engaged campus that supports sustainable social justice. To achieve sustainable social justice, engagement must be bi-directional: from the community to the university and from the university to the community. At the foundation of this goal are the key values of Committing to service; Demonstrating social consciousness and engagement; Driving societal change; and Creating social, economic and environmental sustainability.

Overall Recommendations

These findings suggest that many elements of the 2016-2021 Academic Affairs Strategic Plan continue to have relevance for 2021 and into the near future. The timing of the anticipated appointment of a new Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs allows for that new leader to bring energy and focus to a full strategic planning process for the division early in his or her tenure. In the interim, the current plan can and should be extended for one or no more than two academic years, with some modifications to the current objectives and update of strategies to align current academic unit and academic support unit projects and programs with the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan. Although the *2016-2021 Academic Affairs Strategic Plan* included goals, objectives, and strategies, it did not include benchmarks, measures and targets. Academic units and departments are recommended to develop suitable one or two-year benchmarks, measures, and targets for key objectives, in collaboration with the Provost. This one to two-year period will allow the division to continue focusing on current strategic initiatives while the new leadership is getting established to campus.

Goal 1 Recommendations

Due to the nature of each objective within Goal 1, *Enhance Teaching, Research, and Scholarship* being ongoing in scope, the majority of objectives should be maintained, with revisions to the language to expand the opportunity for multiple units to meet the objectives. Given the minimal differentiation between the wording of Objectives 1.1 and 1.5, it is recommended that Objective 1.5 be consolidated into Objective 1.1. Each of these four objectives align with multiple aspects of the NCCU 2019-2024 Strategic Plan.

Goal 2 Recommendations

Goal 2, *Collaborative Learning and Cross Disciplinary Education* is a 21st century educational paradigm and should continue with representation in the updated Academic Affairs Strategic Plan. Objectives 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 can be maintained with little change. Objective 2.4 is more directly attuned to Teaching, Research, and Scholarship, and can be moved in whole as an objective under Goal 1. Objective 2.5 should be dropped, though relevant language may be incorporated into Objective 1.1. Each of these four objectives link with aspects of the NCCU 2019-2024 Strategic Plan.

Goal 3 Recommendations

Goal 3, *Develop innovative, versatile, and culturally responsive leaders*

Consolidate Objective 3.1 and Objective 3.2 and revise the wording of this objective related to “a better understanding of leadership” as it does not clearly define a measurable outcome that lends itself to assessment. Maintain Objective 3.3 and revise the language to ensure the language within the objective directly targets and provides strategies to guide the connection between leadership development and campus decision-making and planning. Due to the consistency of language between Objectives 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6, the committee recommends consolidating Objectives 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6.

Goal 4 Recommendations

Goal 4, *Create an inclusive environment that promotes an understanding of diverse perspectives, respect for individuality and community and the practice of cultural competence*, Maintain Objective 4.1 in the new strategic plan, while also providing more clarity on Objective 1.4 within the extended strategic plan. The upcoming Academic Affairs Strategic Plan should explicitly state how NCCU will work towards diversity and global immersion for the campus community. The committee recommends maintaining Objective 4.2 and Objective 4.3 for the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan's extended period.

Goal 5 Recommendations

With Goal 5, *Promote a community-engaged campus that supports social responsibility and economic development*, at the core of NC Central University mission and the evidence partially supporting the achievement of the goal, it is recommended that Goal 5 be carried forward and integrated in the next iteration of the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan. The committee recommends dropping Objectives 5.1 and 5.2. Objectives 5.3 and 5.4 can be maintained with little change. Each of these remaining objectives align with multiple aspects of the NCCU 2019-2024 Strategic Plan.

Overall Content Recommendations

The *2016-2020 Academic Affairs Strategic Plan* was focused almost exclusively on outcomes related to faculty and research. This focus made it difficult to demonstrate the work of many academic support units within the division and how they contribute to its success. It is recommended that goals and objectives be broadened to include, recognize, and value the contributions of the academic support units. Although the Academic Affairs Strategic Plan included goals, objectives and strategies, the plan did not include benchmarks, measures and targets. Several of the goal discussions in this report identified content and/or design issues for specific academic units and department. These recommendations should be reviewed for context as the next strategic planning document is finalized.

Challenges and Implementation

A significant disadvantage for the committee in completing this review was the lack of contemporaneous data and analysis specific to this Strategic Plan. The review design used for this report was necessarily a convenience sampling of documents for a post hoc qualitative analysis.

Identifying specific baseline quantitative measures, targets, benchmarks, and success metrics at the outset of a new strategic plan allows the responsible parties to make and follow specific operational plans that are directly in support of the strategic plan. A proactive research and reporting design, incorporating quantitative and qualitative design elements, will allow the mid-stream re-evaluations of strategies and activities to course-correct and better achieve the intended goals. The post hoc nature of the evaluation method utilized for this report is limited in value, and efforts to avoid this evaluation approach are highly recommended.

A significant shortcoming for the current plan was its lack of monitoring and accountability. It is recommended that responsibility for continuous monitoring and evaluation of the new academic affairs strategic plan be assigned to an administrative unit, such as the Office of Strategic Planning and Assessment or the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis. Without ongoing monitoring of activities during the strategic plan period, there is no opportunity to quantify and establish whether success is on track or if course corrections are needed. The colleges, schools, and offices should set annual targets, and review and report their accomplishments, both successes and shortfalls. Reporting should be implemented in the Task Stream system, where reporting on the University Strategic Plan already occurs. This will allow efficiencies in reporting, as well as demonstration of the linkages between the division plan and the university plan overall.