

Strategic Issues for the 1990s:

Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning

Task Force Report

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Introduction

Over the past few years a myriad of issues have emerged at ACSP Executive Committee meetings regarding the future direction, financing, composition, and activities of the organization. These issues include future staff needs, budget issues including dues, election procedures, and others. At the Fall 1990 meeting of the Executive Committee the president was asked to appoint a Task Force to attend to strategic issues for the organization. The Task Force met Friday, March 1, 1991, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, thanks to the generosity of the Hubert Humphrey Institute and John Bryson as facilitator. Subsequently, members of the Task Force met with members of the ACSP Executive Committee on Saturday, March 23, 1991, during the American Planning Association conference in New Orleans. At this meeting, the Task Force presented its initial findings, and facilitated a multi—faceted discussion of issues raised in the Task Force’s interim report. The following pages summarize the discussion at both meetings.

In his initial charge to Task Force members, ACSP president Carl Patton identified the following issues for discussion:

- Goals and vision
- Staffing (permanent vs. free—lance)
- Permanent address
- Revenue sources
- Annual budgeting
- Dues structure
- Auditing/bonding
- Journal subscriptions
- Journal budgeting
- Relationship between ACSP and PAB
- Conference organization and support
- Communication with members

The Task Force felt that it could not address the detailed issues without a comprehensive review of the ACSP mission and goals. Consequently, it initiated a strategic planning process.

Historical Overview

Both meetings included a brief retrospective of ACSP’s organizational genesis and evolution. A consensus emerged that the organization had been transformed from a small informal group of program chairs struggling to protect fledgling departments, to a larger, more formal collective of well—established programs represented by chairs, faculty, and elected officers. The most obvious changes had come in terms of the growth in size and relative diversity of the group. A review of recent ACSP budgets (Appendix A) revealed a modest growth in resources, which was gradually being eroded by approval of increasing requests for ACSP funds. This discussion reinforced the urgency of completing the strategic planning process.

Stakeholder Analysis

One of the critical steps in any strategic planning effort is the identification of stakeholders. Initially, the Task Force members identified persons and groups who appear to have a claim on ACSP activities. The group then ranked the importance of the stakeholders according to their actual (current) as well as their desired future importance to ACSP. Table 1 shows the number of votes received by the top six stakeholders. The results suggest that the Task Force sees ACSP as remaining focused on its educational role, representing programs and faculty.

In order to facilitate discussion of the Task Force's initial stakeholder analysis, the Executive Committee partially replicated that exercise. In their discussion, Executive Committee members argued that the distinction between department leaders and the departments themselves as stakeholders was not realistic, and added other stakeholders, such as university administrators, and citizens/communities.

Table 1. ACSP Stakeholders

	Actual Importance	Desired Importance
<u>Identified and ranked by the Task Force</u>		
ACSP Leadership	9	5
Planning Schools/Programs	8	10
Faculty	7	10
Professional Orgs. (e.g., APA)	4	0
Department Chairs/Heads	2	0
Students	0	4

Added by the Executive Committee

University Administrators
Citizens/communities

In addition, Task Force and Executive Committee members independently rated ACSP's performance in meeting the expectations of each stakeholder identified in the Task Force's interim report. Appendix B compares the ratings of the Task Force and Executive Committee, showing in detail both groups' assessment of the expectations of these stakeholders and how well the organization currently satisfies them.

Although there were some points of divergence between the two groups, as well as occasional confusion regarding the interpretation of items, the comparison shows considerable agreement on the assessment of ACSP's performance.

Issues Identified by Stakeholder Analysis

The stakeholder analysis revealed differences that have arisen over a number of recent issues and have generated internal conflict in the Executive Committee. The Task Force quickly agreed, however, that the "problems" with which it had been presented were of a sort that many organizations would envy: signs of growth, vitality, and the intense commitment of a group of loyalists who know and like one another.

The following exemplify some of the recent debates identified by Task Force and Executive Committee members:

- Interest groups: Should they exist? Do they threaten ACSP solidarity?
- Diversity: What is it? How should it be achieved? Can ACSP do anything about increasing student and faculty diversity, or is the organization wasting its time?
- Organizational growth: What kind of growth should occur? How much? What direction should it take?
- Budget allocations: How should ACSP spend its money? What criteria should ACSP use to make equitable allocations for committees and their activities? (Appendix B summarizes ACSP revenues and expenditures for the past five years.)
- Voluntary service: ACSP assumes that member schools will support their faculty members' voluntary contributions to the organization. Is this "fair"? Does it prevent faculty at less endowed institutions from equal participation, including but not limited to committee participation and running for elected office?
- Electoral process: Should schools vote or individual faculty? How do ACSP assure that a democratic process determines how a school's single vote is cast?
- Issue prioritization: Value differences lead to different priorities. How can these differences be addressed?
- Bureaucratic structure and member services: What changes in structure and services might be needed in the future? What works well and what does not for academic/professional organizations?
- Intra-Executive Committee communication: Do Executive Committee members really know the Executive Committee's history, operating procedures, and informal rules? How can the Executive Committee assure continuity as Executive Committee membership and leadership change?
- Executive Committee meetings: How effective is the current meeting structure? How can Executive Committee activities be improved?

These issues were eventually encapsulated in a list for further study and discussion at the forthcoming Executive Committee meeting in Oxford.

Alternative Conceptions of ACSP

As the Task Force talked about ACSP stakeholders and the issues confronting the organization, it seemed that the discussion—like so many at Executive Committee meetings—was structured by two broad images of the organization. Those images are not very precisely defined, they are sometimes but not always competitive and they are not uniquely associated with discrete groups. Indeed, introspectively, the Task Force recognize how much each of us is sometimes attracted by one image and sometimes by the other. ACSP lives—as an organization—between those inchoate and ambiguous images. Thus, the Task Force recommended to the Executive Committee that it make time for thoughtful reflection on being

“in between” in order to manage and even creatively exploit the tension between the images that operate as (what Ian Mitroff calls) “stakeholders of the organizational mind.”

The Task Force had no trouble naming and elaborating the first image: ACSP as a Consortium of Schools, very much like other academic professional organizations that represent the interest of their fields within the university, but unusual in that it is comprised of and funded by departments rather than individual faculty. It is convenient to think of this as the “original” or “traditional” image of the organization but it would be a mistake either to ignore its continued vitality among both “old-timers” and new recruits or to assume that it accurately describes our organizational beginnings. Within this image, ACSP has very limited moral authority or powers of suasion over member schools. However, it depends on the schools not merely for dues but for a variety of informal or indirect subsidies that make it possible for the ACSP Executive Committee and committees to operate. The leadership group that emerges from the schools presumes that it will rarely confront deep divisions within its own ranks: politicking (except in the public interest) is neither seemly nor necessary.

The Task Force had much greater trouble naming the second image and settled on the proposed label –ACSP as an Arena for Faculty and Other Interests –only after the Minneapolis meeting. Our difficulty may stem from the fact that the Arena is often cast as the new and not fully formed notion that now appears to challenge the traditional image. Again the Task Force caution: the remarkably successful annual conference and the growth of interests suggest to us that the Arena is already a part of the ACSP structure rather than an external upstart.

Within the image of the Arena, faculty attempt to use ACSP to alter the behavior of the schools and, indeed, of the larger professions with which ACSP are associated. They seek to create and allocate a central treasury capable of supporting these initiatives without depending on the few schools willing to subsidize travel and research expenditures. ACSP emerges as an important setting for the articulation of interest groups and the creation of reputations. Politicking for office and advocacy of policy positions are both expected and legitimate.

Figure 1 is a graphic representation of these models. It indicates the ways in which a series of practices and ideas converge to shape each of the central notions and then the consequences of acting within its frame. The cognitive map was intended to initiate discussion by the Executive Committee rather than to replace it: therefore, the Task Force deliberately suppressed some of its reflections on the policy implications of each image in order to focus the Executive Committee’s attention on its provenance and meaning.

The Executive Committee briefly discussed the two cognitive models identified in the Task Force’s deliberations. Members agreed that the organization was being increasingly confronted by diverse needs and demands on its resources. However, some members questioned whether this was a real shift or simply a tangent created by a short-lived budget surplus. Others asserted that fundamentally different concerns were being brought to the table as the organization became more representative of increasingly diverse planning faculty interests.

The Executive Committee noted that while the cognitive models provide a useful conceptualization of ACSP’s internal dynamics, they do not incorporate the impact and changing character of “external” factors (e.g., university budgetary threats) on the planning academy.

Implications of Transitional State of ACSP

Given the outcomes of the stakeholder analysis and cognitive maps, the Task Force concluded that ACSP is facing increased organizational complexity and demands on limited resources. To function more effectively the organization needs to focus on several major aspects of the organization (within the longer list assigned to the Task Force).

- ACSP's purpose and goals
- Membership structure
- Resource base (i.e., dues structure)
- Role of volunteerism vs. paid staff support

The Executive Committee agreed that the growing complexity of ACSP necessitated a reconsideration of the major organizational attributes identified by the Task Force.

ACSP Mission and Identity

While, inevitably, the Task Force focused on the forms and sources of conflict, the Task Force cautioned itself—and the Executive Committee—to remember how deeply ACSP is united by what Mike Teitz phrased as a **“permanent” interest: to represent, affirm, defend, and enhance the field of planning in the university setting while engaging institutions and practitioners beyond the campus.** While ACSP members sometimes argue about the expression of that interest—the balance between intra- and extramural claims, the character of academic and practitioner expertise, and the boundaries of the professional communities to which ACSP members are linked—ACSP members know that those are our arguments and our dilemmas. They define our identity.

The Executive Committee agreed that ACSP's constitutional statement of purposes remains appropriate (see Appendix C). However, additional implicit goals have become embedded in decisions and policies of the organization. The Executive Committee endeavored to develop more explicit statements of these implied goals, as follows:

1. Promote the profession of city and regional planning by impacting the social, economic and physical problems of communities through the education of skilled practitioners.
2. Promote a strong profession.
 - one that is relevant to society
 - one whose members are respected
 - one which has a sound economic base (fiscal support)
3. Promote strong schools (i.e., planning programs) (Protect from intrusion of related fields.)
4. Promote a diversified membership of the field. (Diversify students, faculty, practitioners, ACSP membership)
5. Establish a profession that continually anticipates and responds to society's most pressing problems.

6. Promote high quality education in the field.
7. Promote institutional environments that advance the interests of faculty and students of planning.
8. Create a community of scholars, students and administrators to share ideas and values.

Idealization Exercise

In an effort to clarify the Executive Committee's conceptualizations of ACSP and its potential, each member was asked to respond to the following questions:

What would ACSP look like if it were a successful organization? Or, what indices would provide a measure of ACSP's success?

Appendix D lists the group's responses. It was noted that the group's "wish list" was very consistent with the kinds of goals advocated.

Strategic Adaptations

Thorough consideration of these broad issues will require extensive and reflective discussion. In the interim, the Task Force recommended that ACSP make certain strategic adjustments to improve its current ability to function effectively. By strategic adjustments the Task Force meant developing a number of operating principles and procedures that ACSP, and particularly the Executive Committee, can use to conduct its business while the organization completes its strategic planning process. Appendix E contains examples of these adjustments.

Executive Committee members raised some concerns about the possible implications of making the suggested strategic adjustments. One potential impact would be the creation of a "strong Executive Committee model" as compared with a "strong member model." However, this dichotomy is driven by different definitions of "member." Given these uncertainties and the potential for affecting the organization's fundamental structure, the Executive Committee decided to forego any specific action on the list of suggested strategic adjustments until further information and analysis are provided.

Continuing the Strategic Planning Process

The Executive Committee acknowledged the work of the Strategic Planning Task Force as extremely valuable and timesaving. Furthermore, the Executive Committee decided that the issue areas identified by the Task Force in its strategic adjustments list should be examined more thoroughly. The Executive Committee accepted the Task Force's recommendation to have a retreat in order to engage in more extensive discussion of major issues. This retreat was scheduled during the July 1991 joint ACSP/AESOP congress in Oxford. Further, the Executive Committee decided that discussions at the retreat would be facilitated by having information gathered by small working groups and provided to Committee members prior to the retreat. In

anticipation of that retreat, the following issue areas (and working groups) were suggested by the Task Force:

1. Revenue generation, budget, membership/dues, staffing
2. External relations; threats and opportunities
3. Committee on committees
4. Conferences
5. Journals
6. Communications
7. Database
8. Electoral process, diversity, awards and recognition

The Task Force suggested members for each working group and the President agreed to formally constitute and issue a common charge to each working group. Each working group was asked to provide: (1) descriptive data on the assigned topic, (2) alternative options for ACSP, and (3) any implications of the various actions for the ACSP constitution.

- A. ACSP Finances: Fiscal Years 1986—1991
- B. ACSP Stakeholder Analysis
- C. ACSP Constitution, page 1
- D. How to Measure the Success of ACSP
- E. Strategic Adjustments Proposed by the Task Force