Oakwood University Environmental Scan

Outline

Presented by
Bermultinational Limited
April 13, 2009
Overview

In these times of rapid change and rampant uncertainty looking forward is a critical necessity for every university and college as well as other institutions and organizations. However “looking and acting forward” is essential for the accomplishment of the Mission, Aim and Motto of Oakwood University.

What will Oakwood students focus on as they strive to become ready to fulfill the promise? “Oakwood University graduates are leaders in service to God and humanity.”

In order to help frame the 2011 – 2016 Strategic Plan and Reaccreditation Response in line with Oakwood’s Aim of “Education, Excellence and Eternity,” this compilation of responses to the questions posed by Bermultinational Limited through an Appreciative Inquiry process and a SWOT Analysis are presented in outline form with a final report due on May 11, 2009.

Our Environmental Scan found high ideals, committed efforts, outstanding achievements and accomplishments. Oakwood has a rich legacy of passionate spirituality, lasting relationships, dedicated faculty and successful alumni. However, many comments indicated important challenges in the areas of clear communications and expectations related to the fast pace of change and heavy administrative faculty and staff workload.

Spirituality is clearly a great Oakwood University Strength! It is evident from most of the interview and focus group responses that the current culture of spirituality is a dominant factor of life and living at Oakwood University. Spirituality is demonstrated through a public and also underlying expression of love, devotion and commitment to Christ and Christian values as led by the Holy Spirit and exemplified by the precepts of the Seventh Day Adventist Denomination.

However, respondents also noted that improvement was needed in certain customer service behaviors, communication practices, organizational efficiencies, interpersonal behaviors and other challenges. These needs provide opportunities for a continuing and sustained renewal of the interpretation and practice of spirituality with openness, appreciation, respect and Christian love of others that further sets Oakwood University aside from and ahead of other higher educational institutions.

**Mission Statement:** Oakwood University, a historically Black Seventh-day Adventist institution of higher learning, provides quality Christian education that emphasizes academic excellence; promotes harmonious development of mind, body, and spirit; and prepares leaders in service for God and humanity.

**Aim:** Education, Excellence, Eternity

**Motto:** Enter to learn; depart to serve
A Mission driven theme permeated most of the interview and focus group responses and the Oakwood materials reviewed by the Bermultinational Limited Team of Stirling and Bert Phillips. Oakwood’s seven Strategic Plan Goals are clearly based on the mission, aim, vision, and spiritual ethos of Oakwood University.

**Oakwood University Strategic Plan Goals:**

Goal 1: **Spiritual Vitality:** Promote a Christ-centered, Seventh-day Adventist worldview.
Goal 2: **Educational Excellence:** Demonstrate academic excellence in teaching and learning
Goal 3: **Nurturing Environment:** Facilitate a supportive environment that is sensitive to the needs of students and all other constituents.
Goal 4: **Operational Efficiency:** Ensure efficient service and resource management.
Goal 5: **Resource Development:** Provide sufficient financial resources to support all aspects of the institution.
Goal 6: **Institutional Relations:** Enhance the reputation and relationships of the institution.
Goal 7: **Technology Leadership:** Maintain a technologically progressive campus.

These goals naturally blend with the Appreciative Inquiry process and offer a comprehensive way of exploring issues related to Oakwood’s Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats/Challenges based on a University-wide perspective.

We encourage Oakwood’s leaders to involve all stakeholders in the University to participate in the development of enhancing and enriching the strategic plan through strategic thinking sessions focused on the exploration of traditional, present and new educational and entrepreneurial models, identification of state-of-the-art concepts and best practices and the exchange of new ideas representing a wide divergence of personal and educational experiences.

We believe that this depth and breadth of participation will result in building the overall capacity of Oakwood University and also guarantee sustainable growth and increase the University’s value to God and man. In our final document we will emphasize the areas that we feel are imperative to fulfilling Oakwood’s Mission, Aim and Motto.

Partial Recommendation themes for the final report:

1. Communication and Feedback Channels
2. Action Workshops
3. Quality Customer Service (Who is my customer)
4. University Togetherness
   Alumni/University Success Teaming
I. Appreciative Inquiry

A. Approach

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a strength-based, capacity building approach to transforming human systems toward a shared image of their most positive potential by first discovering the very best in their shared experience. Through a process of inquiry and discovery the institution builds on its “life giving forces” and replicates those strengths throughout the institution. This *positive change approach* has been widely researched and proven effective in a variety of situations (i.e., transformation efforts, education, building learning organizations, parenting, athletics, increasing team and organizational effectiveness, health care, etc.). Cooperrider, D.L., Whitney, D., and Stavros, J.M. (2008). *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook: For Leaders of Change 2nd Edition* Crown Publishing, Inc. Brunswick, OH.

The benefits of the AI process are:

- Creates greater innovation – A Key
- Creates considerably higher levels of motivation and commitment
- Focuses and builds upon what is going right or has gone right
- Identifies the times when the institution was at its best

Traditionally, organizational development consultants ask questions about things that aren’t working well - the problems - so they can fix them. Although this process has its benefits and can be effective, a focus on problems can create a negative, finger pointing climate. In this Environmental Scan, we primarily used the AI approach in conjunction with a traditional Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis.

We had approximately sixty to ninety minutes with each group to conduct our sessions. The groups consisted of the following stakeholders:

- President’s Council
- Staff
- Community Representatives
- Faculty
- Department Heads
- *Alumni Association Officers
- *Board of Trustees
- Students

Recognizing the limited time frame we began each session in a large group to explain the process and ask the initial questions about the strategic plan. We broke the faculty, and students into smaller work groups of six to eight people. We broke the Department Heads and staff into groups of two and three. We found that the smaller the group the more energized the group was about the AI format. Walking around the room during the discussions we heard lively, frank exchanges and discussions about the questions posed. On the whole we found that the participants become engaged in the process. A number of “great” stories were shared within the small and large groups.
Overall the response to the AI format was very positive. *The sessions with the Board of Trustees and alumni were conducted telephonically. We heard comments that people felt more optimistic after the sessions because the focus was on the positive.

During each session we tried to allow a few minutes at the end for an open discussion. Some participants wanted to make sure their concerns and issues were heard and thus we gave them an opportunity to share them. In our session with the students we allowed them to use the more traditional SWOT format along with the AI questions.

As an integral focus of their concerns, participants wanted Oakwood University to succeed and were willing to play an active role in making sure that Oakwood would move forward. The overriding issue was that the time spent during this process will not be wasted and that the information that was generated will be used to develop the Strategic Plan.

The group most familiar with the 2005-2011 Strategic Plan was the Presidents Council. Although there were representatives to the Strategic Planning Committee from each stakeholder group, there did not seem to be wide-spread awareness of the details of the Strategic Plan. There was an awareness of the large accomplishments such as the change to university status as well as building Holland Hall and the Bradford-Cleveland-Brooks Institute.

We have found in our previous work that:

- New “bests” come from increasing the utilization of stakeholders best strengths & competencies
- People want to build and create, not get mired down in only focusing on what is wrong or broke; individuals prefer to create greater ‘bests’
- Aim is to constantly replicate the institution’s ‘bests’

Therefore, we believe that by fusing the information generated from this process into the preparation, development and execution of the Strategic Plan, Oakwood University can constantly replicate its “bests” and increase its vitality, effectiveness and success over the next five years.

B. AI 4- D Cycle

Generally, in the AI process there is a four (4) Cycle methodology consisting of Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. The cycle is illustrated below. In the Discovery Phase, the thrust is on identifying the strengths of the organization through a series of positively phrased questions. The questions are based on the themes agreed upon by the participants or in this case the initiators of this project.

In the Dream Phase, participants imagine a time where their desires and dreams for their institution, in this case, Oakwood University are realized in the present. Participants are then asked to describe what the present reality looks like and entails. The Design Phase involves generating and describing an organizational structure (social architecture) that will enable the dream to become a reality. It addresses design elements such as leadership, management structure,
strategies and policies. The Destiny Phase is where implementation of the dreams or construction of the social architecture takes place along with the laying of a foundation for creating a culture of innovation and improvisation.

In this Environmental Scan our primary focus was on the Discovery, and Dream Phases.

C. Discovery and Dream Phases: Representative Findings in areas inquired about

Utilizing the questions in the focus groups we began to inquire about the “life giving forces” at Oakwood University. As part of this process we began looking at:

1. The core behavioral and productive factors that enable success in Oakwood for all stakeholders.
2. What stakeholders learned from their experiences, especially those moments when they have been at their best?
3. The most effective practices, strengths, or best qualities that need to be preserved as Oakwood prepares for the next five years.
4. The kind of institution Oakwood wants to create in the future.
5. How Oakwood’s positive past, the best of its experiences can help overcome institutional negativity and how it can become more daring and innovative in building a stronger university.
6. Oakwood’s stakeholder’s specific hopes and vision.
On each chart is a short version of some of the questions posed followed by a representative summary of the participants’ responses written as a series of statements or guidelines called “provocative propositions” of how aspects of the dreams will manifest themselves in the future.

Our final report will include recommendations to assist Oakwood University to take the next step in the Appreciative Inquiry process by using this information to design the action steps, strategies and implementation plans to build the institution or construct the dreams from the social architecture that was designed.
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time when energized about work</th>
<th>Time when energized about work</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● When free to be creative to get the job done</td>
<td>● Attending professional conferences</td>
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<td>● When allowed to effect change and make a positive impact</td>
<td>● When Holy Spirit interrupts the lesson plan</td>
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<td>● When ideas and opinions are valued and appreciated without fear of reprisal</td>
<td>● When research proposals are granted and students receive graduate fellowships</td>
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<td>● When students are actively participating in class, graduating, and passing board exams.</td>
<td>● When engaged in retreat ministry and seeing students deepen their relationship with Christ and each other</td>
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<td>● Open communication, feedback and dialog</td>
<td>● Doing more with less, saving money and resources and working collaboratively</td>
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<td>● Having the mindset that &quot;I can do all things through Christ.&quot;</td>
<td>● Having satisfied customers and going the extra mile for a customer</td>
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<td>● Receiving affirmation and recognition for a job well done even if it is just thank you.</td>
<td>● Staff supporting each other in a time of difficulty</td>
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<td>● Connecting with students, and seeing students enlightened by knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<th>Energizing factors that give life and meaning to Oakwood</th>
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<tr>
<td>● Graduations and Successful alumni</td>
<td>● The spiritual aspect (religious programs and activities that encourage one's relationship with God) and the bonds that are developed through campus and dorm relationships. Oakwood creates a &quot;family&quot; environment that is undergirded with love and spans the globe.</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Vibrant student body</td>
<td>● Hard work, compassion and dedication of faculty</td>
</tr>
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<td>● Emphasis on true education as defined by E.G. White</td>
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<tr>
<td>● A focus on eternity</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Diversity of people and campus life</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>● Music</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>● Community Service - NAPS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dream: In three - five years Oakwood will have:</td>
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<td>• An institution that is internally consistent, clear, intentional and energized about its mission and aim such that every program and campus life reflects the mission in a visible way.</td>
<td>• An Alumni Association that plays an active, vital part in the continual growth of the university with a membership of over five thousand alumni spanning the age spectrum. Our alumni regularly contribute financial resources such that our endowment has grown considerably on a yearly basis. Our alumni share their time, energy, knowledge and contacts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Strong, collaborative partnerships with industry and government with an emphasis on the technical, engineering and science fields.</td>
<td>• Improved, upgraded and new facilities, with handicap access.</td>
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<td>• A vocal, visible presence in the local community where Oakwood plays a key role in ministering to the academic, educational, physical and spiritual needs of the community; particularly, the under served members.</td>
<td>• A process for timely, responsive, efficient, technologically current customer service with a smile where the answer is &quot;we will find a way to do it, not we can't do it.&quot;</td>
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<td>• A vital and necessary voice in shaping the future of Huntsville through relationship building and participation on commissions.</td>
<td>• A strong, cohesive, collaborative relationship between the administration and faculty.</td>
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<td>• A growing, diverse, but manageable student body.</td>
<td>• A fiscally responsible institution with broad-based financial support.</td>
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<th>Dream: In three - five years Oakwood will have:</th>
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<td>• An effective collaborative communication process where plans, solutions, and results are timely shared throughout the Oakwood community</td>
<td>• A valued, well trained, professionally current, faculty and staff.</td>
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<td>• A totally Automated Registration process across campus.</td>
<td>• An educational program that includes distance learning, vocational training, adult education, college preparation and more Masters programs.</td>
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<td>• A competitive grant writing program that contributes resources; provides opportunities, and brings recognition to the institution</td>
<td>• An organization that tends to the physical, intellectual, academic, mental, and spiritual health of employees and students.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• A process of continual improvement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Describe when students are energized</td>
<td>When are students excited about learning</td>
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<td>Mastering a new concept</td>
<td>When professors demonstrate an impassioned, energetic, animated approach to teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>During a classroom presentation</td>
<td>When taught practical knowledge or shown how to apply knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participating in Community Service</td>
<td>When beliefs and traditions are challenged and tested</td>
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<tr>
<td>When alumni give a positive report/feedback</td>
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<tr>
<td>During social, spiritual and community activities</td>
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Bermultinational Ltd. SP form 2009
SWOT ANALYSIS

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats/Challenges

It is important to note that we found the responses, comments, ideas, and suggestions of our interviewees and focus group participants synonymous with those of stakeholders queried previously, based on our review of related Oakwood materials including:

- Departmental SWOT analysis, notes
- Strategic plan update
- Strategic planning committee minutes
- Employee opinion survey comments
- Student satisfaction survey

We have characterized “SWOT” in these terms:

- **Strengths (Positive, Internal):** Positive assets and attributes currently present in Oakwood University
- **Weaknesses (Negative, Internal):** Issues or characteristics that limit the current or future growth opportunities for Oakwood University
- **Opportunities (Positive, Internal and External):** Areas where Oakwood University can remedy its weaknesses
- **Threats/Challenges (Negative, Internal and External):** Trends that threaten Oakwood University’s present situation and future goals.

The examples of responses noted in this SWOT Analysis are not listed in any priority; they convey sample clusters that appeared to be important to the participating Oakwood stakeholders.

**Strengths**
- Mission – Aim – Motto
- Spirituality, tradition, vitality, SDA foundation and beliefs, spirit led atmosphere and culture – inspiring, supportive and encouraging environment - a sense of pride and progress and hope for the future.
- Vibrant student body
- Committed and dedicated trustees, administration, faculty, staff, students, alumni and community, growth and change.
- Administrative, faculty, staff and student leadership.
- First graduate degree program
- Variety of educational programs including collaborative degree programs with other institutions
- Extensive building program (new male residence hall – new wellness center - ministerial training and research leadership center)
- Accelerated and comprehensive information technology program and practical application (computer upgrades and wireless installations)
• Significantly improved financial planning process (financial turn-around plan)
• Strong lasting relationships among students that sustains and extends many years after graduation
• Committee of One Hundred (volunteer support group of dedicated persons providing financial support to departments, physical plant expansions and students.)
• Beautiful grounds and extensive acreage

Weaknesses:
• Lack of resources force Departments/Divisions to compete for resources; weakens across-discipline collaborations; permits resistance to change; and provides few incentives to achieve institutional goals.
• Faculty workload, inadequate student advising and inadequate classroom space.
• Inefficient Registration process
• President’s Council decision approval level set too low
• Inadequate Alumni program development
• Inadequate communication regarding key issues that affect all of the stakeholders of Oakwood University
• Lack of a clearly communicated and demonstrable link between goals, strategies and accomplishments
• Department/Division goals not always closely linked to University goals often limiting initiatives to comprehend the broader picture
• Not enough opportunities for cross department/division dialogue about teaching, research, and service so that faculty, staff and students might learn more about and from each other
• Too few opportunities for faculty and staff professional development
• Too much negative emphasis instead of positive approaches to student growth, learning and development in many areas of campus life and living
• Not enough informal learning opportunities between faculty, staff and students across department and division lines
• Rubrics not in place to clarify expectations that educate and encourage all Oakwood University stakeholders to support the Mission by focusing on true university-wide “outcomes” instead of Department/Division “inputs and outputs.”
• Exceptions to policies generally and a lack of consistency regarding academic standards create questions of consistency and fairness
• Infrastructure inadequate and/or unconnected in many areas of campus organization
• Extremely fast pace of initiatives and changes without the time and in-depth development needed to ensure clear messages, supportive to-way communication channels and appropriate placement, replacement and or connection of necessary infrastructure.

Opportunities
• Clear vision, but often uncoordinated or duplicated efforts lead to a failure to implement and/or achieve intended goals at the intended level
• Responding to pressures for outcomes assessment (CCSACS accreditation) and for denominational and public accountability will continue to help in accelerating Oakwood University to develop a culture of continuous improvement and applying rigorous standards for quality program performance and scholarly achievement.
• Oakwood University will continue to emphasize, incorporate and integrate its Aim, Motto and Mission into its culture and in all of its programs and activities and distinguish and differentiate itself from other higher education institutions.
• Creation of a model Alumni membership involvement and giving program. Build the program on redeveloping the strong Alumni to Alumni relationship to a synergetic and sustainable relationship with the University.
• Networking opportunities for students and young professionals with Alabama A & M and University of Alabama at Huntsville, other higher education institutions and various companies in the city and the county.
• The new Masters program can be a model of fostering a culture of research, professional growth and excellence in teaching.
• Identify and obtain additional appropriate grants and contracts; including stimulus plan, BRAC and Faith Based Initiative programs.

Threats
• Unclear image of Oakwood University commitment to fully participate in the Huntsville larger business and technical community
• Acceleration of diversity and inclusion of students and staff and non-tenured faculty without the appropriate in-depth orientation process needed to instill the importance of Oakwood University’s core values as stated in the Mission, Aim and Motto.
• The state of the economy and its pervasive problems could affect recruitment, enrollment and retention of students, faculty and staff, as well as affect the university through rising health care and energy costs.
• Reduced current funding from various sources and fewer opportunities for new funding.
• Solidifying the spirituality culture of Oakwood University to thwart outside influences and identity takeover. - Perceived and real conflict between growth of the University and maintenance of standards and Seventh Day Adventist identity