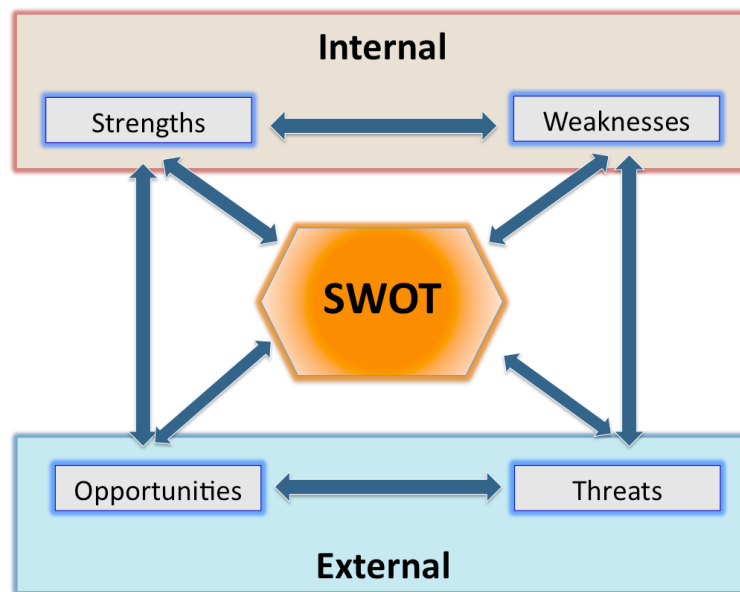


SWOT Analysis Morton College

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This report summarizes the results of a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis conducted by Morton College as part of the College's strategic planning process in spring 2012.



SWOT is a tool that combines perceptions of individuals inside organizations to identify issues during the early stages of a planning process. The diagram above depicts the relationships between SWOT categories. Strengths are the strong parts of the organization that can be directly controlled. Weaknesses, on the other hand, are those elements of the organization that are not positive but can also be controlled. Weaknesses represent areas that Morton College can improve. Opportunities and threats operate outside the organization and while they are usually beyond control, Morton College may be able to influence their impact. The most productive use of energy, however, is on those elements that an organization can control, i.e., strengths and weaknesses.

SWOT responses were gathered from 88 individuals associated with Morton College who responded to an online survey. Their perceptions were categorized in themes and the ten most frequently occurring categories are presented underneath each SWOT area. The appendices contain a visual depiction of each SWOT category as “word clouds” generated by Wordle that give prominence to words most frequently mentioned (Appendix A).

What, So What, and Now What?

Strategic planning can be thought of as a progression from “what,” to “so what,” to “now what.” A SWOT analysis can help an organization to determine “what.” What do we see? What does the SWOT tell us? What emerging patterns can we see? Often, these perceptions need to be tested and verified before firm conclusions are made. For this reason, and because perceptions are *subjective*, a SWOT analysis is only a *beginning* to answer the “so what” and “now what.”

The “so what” represents efforts to make sense of the information collected by SWOT. What does the SWOT information mean to the Morton College now and in the future? What effect is the information likely to have on the organization, students, and to Morton College’ overall work? The “now what” explores options, resources, and how and when the organization can act. This report does not address the “so what” and the “now what” since both require Morton College to integrate these SWOT results within its emerging strategic planning process.

Cautions

A few cautions about the use of SWOT analyses to inform planning are important. First, SWOT analyses are highly subjective. When a wide range of participants are asked to complete a SWOT analysis, not all will have a deep understanding of all the components of the organization. Second, the premium is on perceptions and most often these perceptions are gathered at the *beginning* of a planning process when dialog about organizational strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities is in the early stages. As the Morton College engages in strategic planning these perceptions may grow deeper or may change as new perceptions are created. Ultimately, perceptions that are based on data and fact will be most helpful to the planning process. Next, *what may be regarded as strength by one respondent may be viewed as a weakness by another*. Understanding these differences can help the Morton College to plot future strategy (the “now what”) that makes the most sense in its context. Last, because the accent is on the future it is important that a SWOT analysis not become a platform for settling grudges or personal attacks; when present, such responses have not been considered.

Strengths

The top ten strengths are summarized below (Table 1). Nearly three-quarters (64 of 88) of those surveyed believe that Morton College’ employees (faculty = 33, administration = 15, and staff = 16) are a core strength. Comments were made about administrative responsiveness, faculty dedication, and the helpfulness of the staff. The College also views itself as a friendly place with many “high touch” activities and services. Programs and classes were also cited as a strength, especially the variety of existing classes. As noted above, however, areas that are perceived as strengths may also be regarded as a weakness in other

parts of the SWOT. Respondents cited facilities as a strength including the Jedlicka Performing Arts Center and Hawthorne Works Museum. The Library was also viewed as source of pride. Engagement with the community was also viewed as a strength.

Table 1. Ten Top Strengths	
Count	Theme
33	Faculty
29	Friendly/High Touch
23	Programs/Classes
19	Facilities
18	Technology
17	Small Size/Classes
16	Library
16	Staff
15	Administration
15	Community Engagement

Weaknesses

Table 2 presents elements that are less positive. It represents a subjective assessment of where the institution could improve itself and represent areas that Morton College could control, at least in the eyes of the respondents. Facilities and Communication are areas that many believe need more work. Most comments about facilities indicated that the College was out of space to expand programming and that it could make more effective use of existing space. In general, communication concerns were not specifically directed at any one source or issue. Rather, it appeared that respondents want to be better informed both horizontally (across units and departments) as well as from the top-down and perhaps from the bottom-up. It should be noted that most organizations identify communication as a weakness and, for that reason, Morton is not unique. The results of this SWOT may help the College identify where communication might be improved, however.

Programs and classes were also perceived as an area to address. Most of these comments were directed at the perceived need to increase new programs and delivery modes, two themes that are also opportunities (see below). Several comments specifically named new programs but most comments were generic and indicated the need to expand the College's breadth of programs. More specific comments in this area were made about delivery options including the need to increase online offerings. Comments about technology generally were directed at increasing technology in the classroom. In the faculty area, a number of respondents perceive that the proportion of full-time and part-time (adjunct) faculty should be balanced.

Other areas identified as weaknesses include security/safety in which comments were made about personal safety and the need for more visible security presence. Students were also a theme. Respondents mentioned the need to improve retention and transfer rates as well as the need to address underprepared students. Finance was also identified as a weakness including the need to increase resources for the overall college as well as the impact of reduced finances on institutional operations. Last, comments were also offered about the need to increase the College's policies and procedures.

Table 2. Ten Top Weaknesses	
Count	Theme
61	Facilities
60	Communication
53	Programs/Classes
35	Technology
21	Faculty
20	Security/Safety
20	Students
13	Community Engagement
13	Finances
13	Procedures/Policies

Opportunities

Opportunities occur *externally* to Morton College. They might be pursued with new strategies in the planning process. Morton College could *influence* most of these events and circumstances in some way as it makes choices and applies its creativity. The top ten opportunity themes appear in Table 3.

There was nearly unanimous agreement (87 comments from 88 respondents) that new programming is an opportunity for Morton College including suggestions for expanded programs in career and technical fields, in online and hybrid delivery, and in computer-related areas. Several respondents noted the need for short-term classes as well as bilingual classes in the community.

About half as many respondents (n=45) stated that there is opportunity in increased community engagement including forming alliances with community based organizations, businesses, and local government. Many commented on the need for Morton College to generate new resources from successful grant proposals including drawing on the College's standing as a Hispanic Serving Institution to pursue fresh initiatives. Marketing the College's

programs was also frequently mentioned. Increasing technology in classrooms is also a theme as was the opportunity to increase student support services for specific groups of students.

Table 3. Ten Top Opportunities	
Count	Theme
87	New Programs/Classes
45	Community Engagement
10	Grants/External Funding
9	Marketing
7	Technology
4	Student Support
3	Administrators
3	Advising
3	Location
3	Professional Development

Threats

Threats occur outside Morton College' control and, while they are important, organizational energy is most efficiently focused on strengths and weaknesses that Morton College can control. For example, the Illinois budget looms large. To address, at least in part, this threat Morton College may wish to enhance its performance in key areas, examine its own data to make rational decisions about internal budgets and resource deployment, and otherwise prepare coherent strategies to counteract what appears to be a prolonged period of declining state support.

Almost as highly ranked as a threat are Morton's competitors. Included here are comments about for-profit providers as well as competition from other community colleges in programming and course delivery modes. The economy is perceived as a threat in two ways. First, the current recession has shrunk tax revenues, in turn, shrinking the resources that the College can raise. Second, as the economy improves, students and prospective students may return to the job market and forego enrollment at Morton College. A handful of respondents also identified Illinois' movement toward performance based funding proposal as a threat that might result in smaller state budgets if the College doesn't graduate more certificate and/or degree.

Table 4. Top Ten Threats	
Count	Theme
22	Funding
21	Competitors
13	Economy
6	Performance Based Funding
4	Image
3	Community
3	Politics
3	Student Preparedness
2	Tie: Accountability, Accreditation, Gangs, Job Market

Appendix A
Word Clouds for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

Figure 1. Word Cloud-Strengths



Figure 2. Word Cloud-Weaknesses



