

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Colorado Mountain College

Project Details

Title	Improving the Bachelor's Degree Implementation	Status	COMPLETED
Category	8-Planning Continuous Improvement	Updated	08-30-2013
Timeline		Reviewed	09-26-2013
	Planned Project Kickoff 10-15-2011	Created	11-29-2011
	Actual Completion 04-01-2014	Version	2

1: Project Goal

- A:** The goal of this project is to benefit from the analysis of the bachelor's implementation process at a community college, apply it to future implementations and make recommendations for improvements to our bachelor's degree processes. We researched and visited other colleges that have implemented bachelor's degrees and learned from them, but the learning curve for the developing and implementing bachelor's degrees at CMC has been steep. The college leadership believes focusing on how we can improve the current processes related to these degrees would help CMC minimize issues related to developing and implementing other bachelor's degrees at the college.

2: Reasons For Project

- A:** Two years ago, our President announced that based on the interest expressed by community members in having access to bachelor's degrees at the college's numerous rural locations, the college would immediately begin the work necessary to obtain approval from accreditors for adding four-year degrees to the college's existing offerings. This task appeared daunting considering the accountability demands on colleges to help provide a skilled workforce and global citizens. We began by conducting needs assessments of our communities and the bachelor's initiative took on a life of its own because of the tremendous interest our external and internal stakeholders had in it. The data suggested a great need for a Bachelor's degree within our communities, particularly in the areas of Business, Education, Health Care, Sciences & Social Sciences and Environmental Studies. Since a primary source of the college's funding is local property taxes, the college would like to be able to offer its communities affordable educational opportunities at both the two and four year levels, starting with programs that are not only in high demand but will allow the college to capitalize on its existing resources i.e. a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and a Bachelor of Arts in Sustainability Studies.

Bachelor's degrees quickly became a catalyst for strengthening our two-year processes while building the capacity for the offering of four-year programs. What follows in this presentation is a delineation of how this college galvanized its existing resources over a short time to create a framework for successfully seeking and obtaining the necessary approvals for the offering of bachelor's degrees, as well as a plan for implementing these programs. Based on recommendations from our accreditation, we assembled a Quality Team with college wide representation and this group led the creation and work of 16 "One College Teams" that addressed various aspects of the approval and implementation processes using continuous improvement methodology e.g. Curriculum Development, Student Support, Fiscal Impact & the need to allocate sufficient resources toward four-year programs, Facilities, Marketing & Recruitment, etc. Many of these teams had sub teams as well e.g. Library Holdings. These teams and sub teams were in turn led by faculty and staff from all levels of the organization.

The college leadership thought it went about the creation and implementation of bachelor's degrees in a most systematic and thorough fashion e.g. we looked at best practices among other institutions, we examined existing processes and proceeded to strengthen them and build the necessary capacity for four-year degrees, etc. Yet we found that there were still areas to improve upon and many lessons learned. We wish to continue to learn from our experience with the development and implementation of bachelor's degrees at a two-year school by: a) further improving our processes for our current bachelor's degrees; b) making recommendations for the improvement of future bachelor's degree implementations and c) share what we learned with other colleges at events scheduled at CMC, as well as at state, regional and national conferences.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

- A:** The entire college is affected and involved e.g. CMC's locations/campuses; Academic & Student Affairs and all other functional areas

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: Related to Planning Continuous Improvement and Other AQIP Categories such as Leading & Communicating and Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives:

- Alignment of programs & services with the college Vision/Mission/strategic plan
- Improved process for allocation of resources to 4-year programs
- Developing and conducting an implementation review: what went well? What needs improvement? Improvements of critical components such as: enrollment management/scheduling/corridor model (implementation at 1-2 campuses versus college wide), development of relevant curriculum, career services, use of data to drive decision-making (e.g. communication and marketing)
- Increased contribution to CMC's communities e.g. data demonstrating the college's economic impact

Related to Helping Students Learn AQIP Category:

- The processes impacted by the 2 other AQIP projects (Accountability/Assessment & Environment/Engagement) will help contribute to this project as well
- Improved promotional campaigns
- Improved staff, faculty recruitment & hiring
- Improved quality of curriculum
- Improved program reviews

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: We are currently in our first year of bachelor's degree implementation and are evaluating our progress and gathering data. In addition to the oversight provided by the Quality Team, Academic & Student Affairs, an AQIP Team is studying the bachelor's implementation this fall. These groups will soon provide the information needed to make changes to existing bachelor's processes. Also, the college leadership is continuing to develop itself via the Sustainable Leadership training being conducted over the next few months and this should help us make better progress collectively. Since our aim is to improve upon existing processes related to bachelor's degrees and make recommendations for future implementations (e.g. Teacher Education bachelor's program), one year should be sufficient time for completing this project.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: Via the Quality Team and the College Leadership Team

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: Successful growth of the bachelor's degrees over the next 2-3 years, as well as feedback from constituents

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: This project focused on *Planning Continuous Improvement* through the alignment of the bachelor's programs with the College's Vision, Mission, and Strategic Plan. However, this project had an impact on the *Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs*, *Leading & Communicating*, and *Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives* categories as well.

There has been constructive, quality activity gathering data and creating strategies for the support and implementation of the existing bachelor's programs at CMC: the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) and Bachelor of Sustainability Studies (BASS). The College is moving forward and filling in the gaps with implementation details for these degrees through collaboration and planning. During the past year, based on stakeholder's feedback, the College continued to evaluate and improve processes related to the two existing bachelor's degrees. The feedback obtained in 2011-12 indicated that the majority of stakeholders (internal and external) were satisfied with these two degrees and also made suggestions for improvement. During 2012-13, the College developed

strategies to include greater use of the Interactive Video System (IVS), to provide more access and availability of classes college-wide; a team of faculty and staff developed a two-year plan for course offerings; and, the College hired additional full-time and part-time faculty members.

In the spring of 2013, the College graduated its first class of bachelor's degree students. CMC enthusiastically graduated 51 bachelor's students, 28 with a BSBA and 23 with a BASS degree.

In the fall of 2013, CMC proposed three new bachelor's degree programs to HLC and to the state: the Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS), the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), and the Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies with an Elementary Education Emphasis (BAIS). From the implementation of the first two bachelor's degrees, the College has learned many valuable lessons in terms of how and when to implement these newly proposed degrees. CMC is planning its inaugural BSN class for 2014, while the other two degrees will roll-out in 2015, thus giving the College adequate time to market, recruit, and overall prepare for the new degree programs. The BSN was chosen to roll-out in 2014 because there is an immediate need for it in CMC's communities. These three new degrees were chosen via data from the Community College Baccalaureate Association (CCBA), describing the most common and successful bachelor's degrees at other four-year community colleges, all of which are included in CMC's list of bachelor's degrees. Community surveys also indicated the desire for the College to offer these bachelor's degrees. CMC's fifth bachelor's degree, the BASS, is a signature degree, and like the other four, one that very closely matches the student population in CMC's communities.

Faculty and Instructional Chairs collaborated on developing a college-wide vs. campus-only, course rotation plan for the two bachelor's degrees. This helped with determining if a course can be offered at a campus or if it would better serve students by offering the course as a hybrid. The College continues with the development of a corridor, or a hub model, to better serve students and are moving toward having specific campus focus on scheduling the bachelor's courses college-wide.

The admissions, enrollment management, and the marketing departments worked on tactics to increase the number of applicants for the bachelor's programs. They had several campaigns throughout the year, targeting local, regional, and national audiences. Tactics included online display advertising, paid search ads, Google Adwords, email campaigns, social media posts and promotions, full page ads in High Country news, etc. A bachelor's and associate's student retention campaign targeting existing students before registration using a survey titled "plan now for next semester for optimal success" was conducted by marketing and admissions. Additionally, a bachelor's graduation campaign to show outcomes and build awareness in local markets consisted of gathering stories of the first graduating class, which were highlighted in multi-media presentations, press releases on student success, and in local newspaper ads.

Assessment of upper division courses continued, led by lead faculty who wrote common measurable outcomes and scoring rubrics for their courses. Lead faculty disseminated the information out to all full- and part-time faculty teaching these courses, were the collection point for all data, and took responsibility for entering this information into CMC's assessment management system (TaskStream).

Development of the BSBA emphasis areas in Accounting, Marketing, Management, Finance, and Sustainable Business continued, and they will be offered beginning Fall 2013. Faculty and academic affairs, in conjunction with the Risk Management Department, have worked on providing opportunities for work experiences (internships) for students.

Library services were allocated money to build book, audiovisual, and e-book collections. The library also had a budget increase for the online library to increase database subscriptions for the bachelor's degrees. The Virtual Library director is monitoring usage.

In January 2013, the Strategic Plan for 2012-15 was changed to 2012-2014 to be better able to meet the changing College climate. CMC's Vision and Mission: to become a first choice College and to create a better future for our students, employees, and communities, respectively, as well as the five strategic focus areas: transformational experiences for our students and employees, transformational experiences and growth for our communities and partnerships, transformational growth for our enrollment and programs, remain the same. A Balanced Score Card (BSC) has also been developed with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that underscore relevant state and federal metrics, as well as progress measures relevant to the College and its Strategic Plan. Strategic priorities were identified through the strategic planning process, using thorough environmental scan data, which includes internal and external (local, regional, state, national, and international trends) information and reports. Continuous improvement tools, SFAs, goals, sub goals, and BSC KPIs are developed based on best practices and internal/external needs and are monitored regularly.

2: Institution Involvement

A: There was college-wide participation from Academic and Student Affairs on the existing two degrees, as well as in the development of the three newly proposed degrees (BAS, BSN, and BAIS) throughout the academic year. Academic and Student Affairs met as a “Joint Leadership Team” (JLT) to address the impact the bachelor’s degrees had on these areas and discussed strategies related to this initiative, such as admissions, recruitment, student success, and assessment.

Faculty, both full- and part-time, continue to review and make modifications as needed throughout the academic year to the existing bachelor’s degrees. There was collaboration college-wide on the course learning outcomes, common textbooks, and other materials, as well as in the scheduling of courses. Faculty worked with Instructional Supervisors/Chairs who actively participated on bachelor’s degree committees to accomplish this work. The College Leadership Team (CLT), the Quality Team (QT), Academic Affairs, Library Services, Student support, recruiting, marketing, and admissions continually review the data provided by Institutional Research to ensure all stakeholder needs are met and students are successful.

Teams consisting of faculty and academic and student affairs staff worked on each of the three proposed new bachelor’s degrees by researching, designing, assisting with the needs assessment, engaging students and community members, and presenting the degrees for College approval.

CMC’s local communities and faculty and staff have been working together in the development of internships in each new degree program. These internships will offer students the opportunity to work and learn from different businesses, industry, governmental agencies, and educational entities in these specific degree programs.

QT and other College leadership and functional areas stayed involved in the development of the three new bachelor’s degrees.

3: Next Steps

A: Although the current Action Project was to be completed in June 2013, and the last update stated that CMC would likely retire it later in the year, the College was already preparing for the launch of more bachelor’s programs, and thus, the continuation of the project seemed sensible. With the proposal of the three new programs, it also makes sense to further continue this Action Project. The next steps are to continue to monitor and improve on the two existing bachelor’s degrees, using continuous improvement tools, and to continue with the development of the three proposed degrees. Needs assessments have supported the next three degrees to be a Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS), Bachelor of Nursing (BSN) and a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies (BAIS) in Teacher Education. During 2012-13, teams consisting of internal and external stakeholders continued their research and designing of these degrees. These proposed degrees received approval from the Academic Program and Resource Committee (APRC), which reviews and approves programs, CLT, and the Board of Trustees. HLC approval has been sought for offering the BSN in the fall of 2014, as there is a pressing need in CMC’s communities, and for the BAS and BAIS to begin in the fall of 2015.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: One of the continued outcomes of this project has been improved college-wide collaboration and communication, as evidenced by the sheer wealth of information that is posted and shared on CMC’s external and internal web pages, at key meetings, via email, and in person. This occurred partially because stakeholders simply wished to be informed and involved with these degrees. Full-time and adjunct faculty collaborated on the assessment of student learning outcomes and common textbooks. The development of a college-wide schedule of upper division courses for each program was developed and posted on the CMC website. With increased communication, an increase in the efficiency of processes followed, due to the ease of knowledge-sharing, data and results dissemination, and the overall increased ability to work collectively.

After much research on other programs, best practices, and national benchmarks, three new bachelor’s degrees have been submitted to HLC. It is the College’s goal to continue working on these next steps throughout this next academic year. The newly proposed degrees won’t roll out until 2014 and 2015, due to the knowledge gained from the implementation of the first two bachelor’s degrees. This will allow adequate time for preparing, marketing, and recruiting for the new degrees, which was not the case for the BSBA and the BASS degree implementation process, thus resulting in lower, first-year enrollment numbers. However, the second year (12/13) these degrees were offered, enrollments climbed almost 33%, due to the marketing and recruiting accomplished in this time. CMC has used this knowledge to push back the roll out of the newly proposed degrees until at least next year, giving the College a chance to have a robust inaugural class in each of these programs.

5: Project Challenges

- A:** Planning is important to the success of any initiative. However, more than planning is the value of having a consistent planning process for creation, launching, and implementation of the bachelor's degrees, as well as a plan to sustain growth. Perhaps the greatest challenge in moving forward is to create structures and systems that can continue to manage the delivery of the bachelor's programs across CMC's district to ensure student success. The College recognizes the need to provide access to the courses through an effective delivery system that ties to an enrollment management system and the need to continue work on the delivery methods.

CMC originally worked under very tight timelines while the first two bachelor's degrees were designed and implemented. The challenge has been to review processes and learn from both successes and shortfalls, so as to successfully implement the three new bachelor's programs. Analysis of past planning processes (e.g., changing admissions requirements to support the bachelor's degrees) has been informative for the College, and these insights have been incorporated into the planning process for the three newly proposed degree programs. The College continues to gather benchmark data from other schools implementing bachelor's degrees through the CCBA.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

- A:** It is clear that Colorado Mountain College (CMC) has made a considerable investment in developing and successfully implementing new bachelor degree programs. This continued action project focuses on improving the implementation of new bachelor degrees based on past experience and the experience of other institutions. CMC identifies four AQIP Categories related to this action project. I see support for all four.

AQIP Category 8 Planning Continuous Improvement

The main goal of the action project is to learn from the implementation process for CMC's first two bachelor degree offerings. There is evidence that a considerable effort has been made to gather data on student satisfaction, community perceptions, and student learning (*Principles of High Performing Organizations Fact-based information gathering; HLC Criterion 4 Teaching and Learning Evaluation and Improvement*), and use those data for improvements (e.g. greater use of the Interactive Video System, development of a course rotation, allocation of additional resources to support the new programs (*HLC Criterion 5 Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness*), and efforts to ensure consistency of learning outcomes).

AQIP Category 3 Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs

The new degree offerings seem to respond to community needs and stakeholder interests. Stakeholders have been surveyed to assess the first two degree programs. The degree programs seem to have been selected with students in mind, and improvements are focused on improving student experiences (e.g. by making courses available across campuses).

AQIP Category 5 Leading & Communicating

New degrees and the commitment to improving the implementation process have come from senior leadership, who seem to have supported leadership across the campuses. The update provides many examples of broad communication.

AQIP Category 2 Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives

The Bachelor of Arts in Sustainability Studies is identified as a signature program and is featured on CMC's website. The continuous improvement efforts would support the on-going development of this distinctive program as well as others that may follow.

In my view, this project demonstrates a commitment to other *Principles of High Performing Organizations* (*Broad-based Involvement, Promoting Collaboration*) and *HLC Criterion 1 Mission*, since the project fosters collaboration across campus to better fulfill the College's mission: "To Create a better future - Creating better futures for our students, our communities, our partners, and our team members".

2: Institution Involvement

- A:** This project effectively promoted collaboration of faculty, staff, and community members across each campus of a multi-campus system (*AQIP Category 9 Building Collaborative Relationship, Principle of High Performing Organization Promoting Collaboration*). Well done.

3: Next Steps

- A: These next steps seem appropriate. CMC recognizes that the two bachelor degrees initiated in 2011 can still be improved, and has plans to use lessons learned from their implementation to the anticipated launch of three new programs.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

- A: Beyond the specific lessons learned for implementing new degrees that may be useful (e.g. in appropriately staging the roll out of the three new degree offerings), it seems the college has expanded its capacity for measuring effectiveness (*AQIP Category 7 Measuring Effectiveness*) and promoting effective collaboration (*Principle of High Performing Organizations Promoting Collaboration*).

5: Project Challenges

- A: CMC recognizes the limitations of introducing new degree offerings in a short amount of time. Attention to the continuous improvement of the student learning experience (*AQIP Category 1 Helping Students Learn, Principle of High Performing Organizations Learning-centered environment*) seems like a good area of focus for the future.

Project Outcome

1: REASON FOR COMPLETION

- A: Through agile process improvements, CMC met the challenges of offering two, new four-year degrees. As mentioned by the HLC reviewer in the feedback section of CMC's most recent report, "This project effectively promoted collaboration of faculty, staff, and community members across each campus of a multi-campus system."

2: SUCCESS FACTORS

- A: The College recognizes that the two bachelor's degrees approved and initiated in 2011 have room for continuous improvement. CMC is using the "lessons learned" from implementing the first two bachelor's degrees, such as how teams were formed (e.g., inclusion of student affairs from the beginning), program design, and better internal and external communication to prepare for the anticipated approval of three new bachelor's programs. To help ensure quality learning outcomes, CMC faculty assess all 300- and 400-level courses during regularly scheduled in-service meetings and use assessment data to collaboratively and continuously improve each course. Enrollments for this new bachelor's endeavor are outstanding, with FTE growing from 68.80 in the first year (2011–12) to 188.56 in the second year (2012–13), a 174% increase. This year, CMC is on track for a 10% increase in bachelor's enrollment. In spring 2013, CMC proudly graduated its first class of 51 bachelor's students.

3: UNSUCCESSFUL FACTORS

- A: CMC recognizes that the first two bachelor's degrees can still be improved upon. There was a short span of time when the HLC approved the two degrees to when the first course offerings took place. We were prepared to start registering students. However, until the degree was approved, all systems (Marketing, advising, registration) were on hold. The lesson learned is to have enough time to adequately market to students and advise them as they move through their associate's degree in a way that will help them seamlessly transition to the bachelor's track. We also rolled the two degrees out at every campus, and that led to some low enrollment courses. We have since moved to a model that supports the bachelor's at specific campuses and are using a hybrid model to engage students from across the district. It has been a good transition thus far.