

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Colorado Mountain College

Project Details			
Title	IMPROVE SUCCESS for CMC LEARNERS	Status	COMPLETED
Category	7-Measuring Effectiveness	Updated	09-14-2006
Timeline		Reviewed	10-08-2006
	Planned Project Kickoff 05-05-2002	Created	11-23-2009
	Actual Completion	Version	3

1: Project Goal

- A:** This goal is to improve success for CMC learners, to include a 55% persistence rate for degree seekers and a 90% satisfaction rate for all. Persistence is defined as retention from semester to semester, graduation from CMC, and/or transfer to another educational institution. Success for all students is defined as satisfaction with meeting their educational goal(s).

2: Reasons For Project

- A:** CMC's graduation rate reported in the last Quality Improvement System (QIS) report through the Colorado Commission on Higher Education was 18.6%. The statewide average for 2-year community colleges is 20.4%. CMC's one-year retention rate (also a part of the last QIS report) was 41.9%; the statewide average was 48.6%. We currently have no data on student transfers; however, this may soon be possible through the services of the National Student Clearinghouse. We do not have good data on student success as defined by educational goals other than receiving a degree. We do know that community members look to CMC for job training, personal enrichment, basic skills, and a range of other educational needs. We have course evaluations, focus group data, community surveys, and a variety of other instruments indicating that students are satisfied with Colorado Mountain College (the 2000 AACCC Faces of the Future survey reported a credit student satisfaction rate at CMC of 87%, compared to 83% nationally). A study conducted last winter showed that about 7,000 students attended classes in the fall and did not return in the spring. Those students responding to a survey indicated that, for the most part, they did achieve their educational goals. Because we have such a high headcount, and because so many of our students are non-degree seekers, we feel it is vital to improve the success rates for all CMC learners.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

- A:** Student success is a critical component of nearly every arm of the institution. One area greatly affected is the faculty. Faculty are currently refining a capstone course which assesses student and institutional effectiveness in meeting ten identified learning outcomes. Senior faculty meet each summer to assess institutional portfolios. CMC employs around 900 community faculty each year; including community as well as full-time faculty in student learning initiatives is always challenging. Other areas directly affected are Division Directors (The Learning Council), Student Services, the Registrar's Office, Registration Technicians, Admissions, and the Student Learning and Student Access and Success Departments. Institutional Research is a crucial component in assessing performance of all the vital few. Task Forces involved include the Enrollment Analysis Team (EAT) and the Administrative Leadership Team (ALT).

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

- A:** Admissions and Registration: A new component of registration forms asks students to indicate their reasons for enrolling in each class. Application forms ask for overall educational intent. Other critical processes affected are pre-enrollment, orientation, financial aid, housing, advising, assessment, scheduling, and student accounts. Faculty and staff training, and post-graduation student tracking are critical processes.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

- A:** 1. Through Collegewide Gathering Days and rewards and recognition ceremonies: Mission Day in the Fall, Celebration Day in the

Spring, Faculty convocations and orientations 2. Through focus on goals, processes and outcomes as a part the agenda for each decision-making group: President's Staff, College Council, Administrative Leadership Team, The Learning Council, Information Technology Council, Student Access and Success Task Force 3. Better communication with community faculty through e-mail, listservs, and on-line tools.

6: Project Success Monitoring

- A: Faculty participation in EDU250 (Effective Teaching). Faculty completion of 90 hours of CMC-authorized training. Inclusion of more complete student information in faculty rosters, such as student education goal, student e-mail, student advisor name. Collegewide use of new student enrollment form to gather information on educational goals for each course. Analysis and improvement goals based on tracking of student educational goals identified in the student application for admission.

7: Project Outcome Measures

- A: Persistence: retention rates, graduation rates, transfer rates Satisfaction: student goal clarification, success in meeting educational goals, conversion to degree status where appropriate

8: Other Information

- A: Identify student goals through application for admission. Distribute goal information to advisors and faculty. Track student success in achieving goals. Identify students close to degree completion, but who have never indicated a degree intent. Contact students to develop a plan for graduation from CMC. Identify returning customers and develop a program of on-going outreach.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

- A: Over the past year, faculty in-services have continued to have classroom assessment as a central theme, as well as other areas for professional development e.g. recently, Dr. Robert Sherfield trained the academic and student development staff on creating an atmosphere of success. CMC's graduation rate is at 26%, which is above the target of 23%. Our fall to fall retention is at 52%; our fall to spring retention is 79%. Our persistence rate is at least the target rate of 55%, but we did not have transfer data on the 2002 cohort. We have joined National Student Clearinghouse and are in the process of getting that data. With the Learning College emphasis, there has been a move to using better indicators of success. We have also joined the National Benchmark Project and the data in the form of percentiles will be available shortly and we will be able to redefine our measures and targets as needed. We participated in the CCSSE administration last spring which gave us better information about our students with respect to active/collaborative learning, student faculty interaction/involvement, and support for learners i.e. what we are doing well in these areas and what we need to improve. For our full-time students, CMC tended to be at or above for the CCSSE benchmarks; however, for part-time students, CMC tended to be below the CCSSE benchmarks. Overall student satisfaction on the CCSSE was 84%, which is below the target of 90%. This target was established using the Noel-Levitz Satisfaction Survey, so once we receive National Benchmark data, we may need to redefine it. We are currently using these CCSSE data as baselines and for improvement. The CCSSE will be re-administered in the spring. We have been using IDEA to evaluate student satisfaction with instruction since fall 2004 and CMC scores were again higher in all areas (e.g. Progress-Relevant Objectives, Improved Student Attitude, excellence of Teacher, and Excellence of Course) than the IDEA System scores. Students rated teacher excellence at 4.4/5.0. Results are regularly presented to faculty through the Faculty Evaluation Council, so instruction can be further improved. The advising website is successfully being used by faculty, counselors, and other staff to ensure consistent information to students and there has been an increasing use of technology in the classroom. eNews continues to be a resource for all stakeholders, with a 64% increase in use over the past year. CMC's effective teaching course has been helpful to faculty. The Freshman Year Experience has been targeted more at some sites than others (e.g. Rifle's Academic Success class; Vail and Aspen's Early Alert) and Student Development has been working on making this more consistent with its Base Camp Taskforce (established in January 2006) and is beginning to pilot an initial version of the program. Similarly, retention strategies have been more consistently woven through strategic plans. We are also working on gathering better information about student educational goals with our new application form that will be available shortly. A Graduate Survey was administered via mail in 2005 and via the Web just recently to determine how effective CMC was in their goal attainment and getting the needed skills. In 2005, 58% (another 33% rated it as average) of the graduates who responded rated the overall quality of their academic program as excellent compared with 64% (another 30% rated it as average) in 2006. The complete report is forthcoming and will be shared

college wide. The Community College Learning Assessment will be used to help measure general education learning outcomes and provide comparison data. Data from the most recent community survey of a 3-year survey cycle that will be complete in 2007 (Aspen Campus') suggested that 68% of the respondents rated instruction as being excellent to good and 80% would recommend CMC to others. The classes they took helped enrich their lives, reach their personal goals, improve their work performance, learn a new language, and meet people. The surveys have been helpful with determining offerings, scheduling, and how well we're reaching our constituents. With respect to employee learning and success, an Employee Survey reflecting the 9 AQIP categories was administered in 2005 and 2006 and the results suggested improvement over the past year, with employees feeling somewhat better informed and CMC being slightly more effective as an organization. The results were communicated college wide last year and led to targeting improvements in communication, planning, measurement and evaluation. The 2006 report will also be shared college wide soon. Input has been sought from employees regarding how well CMC values them and what we can do to improve. CMC also took part in the AQIP Organizational Climate Questionnaire last year. CMC's means on the 15 factors tended to fall between 4-5 on a 7 point scale, with a 7 indicating strong agreement that the factor is practiced at the organization. The results were shared with the College leadership. A Learning College Inventory was administered to the Administrative Leadership group and the results indicated that CMC had made progress towards the ideal with respect to becoming a Learning College. A 360 evaluation process is currently being implemented and feedback is being sought on the new employee goal setting process. Student (e.g. student-of-the-month, dean's lists, etc.) and employee (eNew's great Job award, Appreciation Day and its awards, faculty of the year, etc.) recognition occurs frequently. Human Resources is making recommendations for "Learning for Leaders"-a proposal for growing leaders from within. Examples of Learning College outside the classroom have been documented and will be shared college wide e.g. Wellness Fair, expanding on core values, mentoring for first-year students, learning conversations, improving faculty credentialing, development and use of a grants manual, HR and What's Up Summit newsletters, defensive driving, etc. With the addition of a new Chief Information Officer and a strong team of Campus Deans, and support from the President, technology is constantly being improved and increasingly available with the necessary training e.g. smart classrooms, IVS, wireless ports, blackboard, better Website, etc. Using best practices observed during visits to Moraine Valley & Valencia, as well as other research and knowledge, under the leadership of the Chief Learning Officer, this AQIP goal has focused on defining and measuring course learning outcomes for selected courses, with the goal to have outcomes and measures completed by summer 2007 and the timelines for assessment of students/data analysis/curriculum changes established.

2: Institution Involvement

- A:** Organizational change has continued because of the focus on becoming a Learning College and continuous improvement and this has helped increase involvement. Continuous improvement related initiatives reflected one of the four college wide strategic goals. Training in using continuous improvement tools has been provided fairly regularly, with a quality facilitator training the Administrative Leadership Team this summer. This representative leadership responded (both at the training and in a subsequent survey) very enthusiastically to moving forward in an even more systematic and focused way. CMC's culture continues to change because of this, as well as retirements and new hirings. This is still impacting everything, particularly how we conduct ourselves daily with students, the community, and one another. With strong teams at the campuses and District Office, there has been increased collaboration across and within areas. Student Development has been working on making the first year experience more consistent with its Base Camp Taskforce which has college wide representation. The Sponsor for this project, our Chief Learning Officer, and the Learning Outcomes Assessment Team has been refining this project. Strategic Planning that is tied to Board Ends, College goals and AQIP goals is becoming more systematic and data based all the way to employee goals developed through our new employee evaluation process, with improving success targeted throughout and actually being one our four College strategic planning goals. The enthusiasm for CMC becoming a Learning College has been increasing steadily, with more frequent Learning College related discussions.

3: Next Steps

- A:** To continue to become more focused with our initiatives through the Learning Outcomes Assessment Project group and Diversity Council and thereby strengthen teaching and learning. Learning strategies will be developed and curriculum and instruction will be modified as necessary based on assessment data. With assistance from the Diversity Council another focus will be to help Hispanic students move from ESL/GED to credit. Also, better transfer data will be available through National Student Clearinghouse. At our leadership meetings in the coming weeks, we hope to further streamline processes for this AQIP goal. Following the completion of this refinement process, the project details will be updated on the AQIP Website.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

- A:** Despite the great distances between CMC sites, there has been increased collaboration across our various sites with our enthusiasm

and shared focus on student and employee learning e.g. via email, listserves, newsletters, Website, frequent meetings/other gatherings (e.g. learning college conversations) and celebrations, etc. Best practices are increasingly shared and CMC is doing a better job of planning for student success in a strategic manner. This increasingly collaborative and caring culture that is there to help students learn is one CMC's greatest strengths. There is greater emphasis on gathering and utilizing data-something CMC historically has had less of a tendency to do.

5: Project Challenges

A: Our efforts with this project, in the past, have been college wide, but diffused, so documentation of our real progress for CMC as a whole has been difficult. Due to the various sites being so spread out over Western Colorado, systems thinking, cohesiveness, and balancing consistency versus unique needs across sites and their communities has been a challenge. We struggle with gaining even greater involvement, since the same people tend to serve on numerous committees, particularly for this project in which faculty are largely involved. There is increased collaboration and communication amongst District office and campuses, as well as amongst functional areas, but much progress still needs to be made in this area because initiatives are sometimes followed through more at one site than another. This should improve with the more focused approach on improved assessment and strategic planning (better alignment of budgeting and planning processes) currently underway. The CMC culture is just beginning to move to consistent data based decision-making, creating a culture of evidence and continuous improvement. Thus, it has also been challenging to come up with consistent definitions of more useful measures for measuring success than graduation and retention. With our relatively new Information Management System, although much progress has been made, it is still sometimes challenging to effectively gather student information and track students e.g. educational goals met or not; skills learned, etc. We need to better track students from the prospect stage to after they leave us and be able to determine how we can better meet their needs and help them be more successful. During this time of transition and exciting changes, we sometimes have to keep ourselves from reinventing the wheel and instead focus on streamlining inefficient processes.

6: AQIP Involvement

A: Momentum has been going with learning conversations, assessment trainings, the defining of course learning outcomes. Also, at last year's AQIP Strategy Forum, we focused on elaborating on this project. We will likely seek some guidance during our 2007 Quality Check-Up visit.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The update's description of the year's progress on this Action Project is very extensive – in fact, the description appears to report on more components than those indicated in the project description. It appears that the original goal of the project – to improve student success as measured by graduation rates and retention rates – has expanded considerably over time. This is not a surprising outcome, given that “student success” can be defined and measured in a myriad of ways. Based upon the information provided, it appears that the College has achieved considerable success: improving graduation rates from the original 18.6% to current 26% and increasing fall-to-fall retention from 41.9% to 52%, for example. These are outstanding results in a few years' time and reflect the College's focus on gathering and acting on data; incorporating Learning College principles; and becoming a more quality-centered institution. One of the most significant components of this update is the description of all of the measures that the College is using – CCSSE, Noel-Levitz, IDEA, National Benchmark Project, Organizational Climate Survey, Learning College Inventory, etc. The use of data to better understand our institutions is a powerful tool – it is even more powerful when used to make improvements. It appears that the College has taken that step when it reported that the Employee Survey was used to set new performance targets. The College is reflecting many of the AQIP principles and categories: measuring effectiveness, understanding students' and other stakeholders' needs, helping students learn, and valuing people.

2: Institution Involvement

A: The update describes the involvement of a broad spectrum of people in this project – students, employees, graduates, and other staff members as well as the leadership of the College. This broad involvement is significant to the success of the project and reflects the AQIP principle of broad-based involvement.

3: Next Steps

- A:** The “next steps” described in the update reflect a continuing expansion of this Action Project on “student success.” The College may want to seriously consider retiring the original project since the emphasis on graduation rates and retention rates has apparently become embedded within the institution’s standard processes. Then the College can move forward and establish one or more new Action Projects on more defined initiatives – such as increasing diversity. Take time to celebrate the successes that have already been achieved.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

- A:** The College has reported a very dramatic use of gathering and collecting data. It would be interesting to see how this amount of data is managed, analyzed and shared.

5: Project Challenges

- A:** The College documents a wide variety of different components that are part of the "student success" Action Project. Because of this complexity - and the expansion from the original project description - it is not surprising that it has been a challenge to manage the many components. It may be appropriate to "break out" the different components of the project into separate projects that can be more specifically defined and addressed.

6: AQIP Involvement

- A:** The Quality Check-Up visit would be an excellent opportunity to seek guidance from an outside source on the next steps of this project.