

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Colorado Mountain College

Project Details		
Title	Creating an Environment that Promotes Student Engagement and Success.	Status COMPLETED
Category	1-Helping Students Learn	Updated 08-29-2013
Timeline		Reviewed 09-16-2013
	Planned Project Kickoff 05-01-2010	Created 03-26-2010
	Actual Completion 04-01-2014	Version 4

1: Project Goal

A: This action project in concert with another focused on assessing student learning will launch Colorado Mountain College into its comprehensive plan for assessing the student experience in three dimensions: learning, success and environment. This project will utilize student engagement data from CCSSE and SENSE to intentionally inform strategy that will improve levels of student engagement. Additionally, data relative to student performance over three academic years has been assimilated into 11 key performance indicators. These indicators will provide a baseline from which to set targets for improving student success, evaluate current programs and services and cultivate the development of promising initiatives.

2: Reasons For Project

A: Upon the arrival of our new president in July, 2008, CMC embarked on the development of an aggressive strategic plan and related balanced scorecard for actualizing the college's previous commitment to continuous improvement and learning college principles. One third of this strategic plan is focused on becoming "first choice in learning through maximizing student learning and success." Inherent in this aspiration and the first objective in this major goal is the development of a comprehensive system of assessment. Finally, our System's Appraisal Feedback report received in October 2009 established an imperative that we "select measures of performance, collect appropriate evidence, analyze and communicate results and make improvements where needed."

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: Academic Affairs
Student Affairs
Institutional Effectiveness

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: Evaluation of student services and programs, success initiatives, engagement in and out of the classroom, instructional delivery, academic advising, First Year Programs, orientation, etc.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: While this project represents a long term endeavor, there are three primary reasons for the 24 month duration of this version. First is the amount of time necessary to effectively analyze the respective data sources, plan and execute change, measure effectiveness and incorporate recommendations into the next cycle. Second is the need to cascade this process out over seven campuses and a critical mass of programs and people in order to create a culture change. Finally, this will create a sustained focus through our next Systems Appraisal scheduled for 2012-13.

Year One:

- Familiarize campus stakeholder groups with the CMC assessment plan
- Review assessment instruments, measures and related data
- Conduct college wide assessment training for all fulltime faculty and student affairs professionals
- Conduct introductory data analysis sessions at the campus level
- Apply appropriate assessment measures to selected programs

- Plan for continuous improvement cycle in identified programs
- Conduct reflection sessions to assess results and incorporate findings into next iteration

Year Two:

- Update measures (CCSSE data, KPIs, etc.) and analyze findings
- Incorporate recommendations into current programs and planning new programs
- Continue assessment training for faculty and staff
- Apply assessment measures to additional selected programs
- Review completed continuous improvement documentation from previous year's programs
- Conduct reflection sessions for new and existing programs
- Integrate findings into next iterations of programs

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: Incremental milestones will be established for the annual activities outlined above and progress will be monitored by the college Quality Team, Assessment Committee and Student Affairs Council using the outcome measures outlined in section "I".

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: Indicators of success will include: numbers of persons trained in utilizing assessment system and data, number of projects utilizing success and engagement measures, number of continuous improvement cycles completed and documented and changes in student experience based on interventions e.g. as evidenced by CCSSE, IDEA, Student Progress KPIs.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: Fundamentally, all of the following student engagement activities described in this section are intended to improve student success. CMC has four major Key Performance Indicators under Students on its Balanced Scorecard. The results of this year's efforts should be reflected to some extent on the BSC. It should be noted that CMC takes great pride in its student success. In the 2012-13 CNN Money survey of 800 community colleges, CMC was ranked 17th, based on the percentage of students graduating or transferring to a 4-year university. <http://money.cnn.com/pf/college/community-colleges/>

In terms of both "Rate of Attempted/Completed Credits" and "DevEd Student Transition to 100-level math," CMC improved significantly. For "Successful Course Completion," the college stayed at 80%. The one area that the college did not perform as well as the year previous was "DevEd Student Transition to 100-level English." For this category, the college, and others, is participating in a statewide initiative of a major redesign of the developmental education curriculum. The new curriculum, which combines reading and writing into a single course, is being piloted Fall 2013 with ASSET pre- and post-exams being used to compare results.

Institutional Engagement Measures to Improve Student Success:

Many activities were conducted this year to support student engagement for student success. The key indicators measuring engagement are the CCSSE and the SENSE. The aggressive goal for the key CCSSE indicators was to get into the top 10% nationally. The table below shows where CMC stands on the key 2010 CCSSE indicators:

	<i>CMC</i>	<i>Top 10%</i>
Active & Collaborative Learning	54.0	59.6
Student Effort	51.9	57.7
Academic Challenge	50.0	57.1
Student-Faculty Interaction	54.3	58.4
Support for Learners	49.7	59.6

Compared to medium colleges nationwide, here is where CMC stands in terms of 2009 SENSE:

	<i>CMC</i>	<i>Medium Colleges</i>
Early Connections	61.0	50.0
High Expectations and Aspirations	49.6	50.4
Clear Academic Plan and Pathway	55.8	50.5
Effective Track to College Readiness	47.2	49.5
Engaged Learning	53.4	49.2
Academic and Social Support Network	54.5	50.0

In the 2009 SENSE results, CMC outperformed medium Colleges on four of the six benchmarks: Early Connections, Clear Academic Plan & Pathway, Engaged Learning and Academic & Social Support Network. In terms of the CCSSE, the College consistently received its highest benchmarks in the areas of Active and Collaborative Learning and Student-Faculty Interaction. After studying the CCSSE and SENSE results, the college-wide approach was to take a “strengths approach” by focusing on what the college does best and getting faculty and staff to take their excitement to expand efforts. In terms of the CCSSE, CMC performed best in the categories of “Faculty-Student Interaction” and “Active and Collaborative Learning.” In terms of the SENSE results, CMC did best in terms of “Early Connections” with students.

- **The “We Care” campaign:** All faculty were asked to call absent students and to place a statement on their syllabi saying that “I WILL CONTACT YOU BY PHONE OR OTHERWISE IF YOU MISS TWO CLASSES IN A ROW AND ARE UNRESPONSIVE VIA CANVAS SINCE I TRULY CARE FOR YOUR SUCCESS.” Thirty-nine faculty officially registered (only 4 percent) via the CMC website, although many others anecdotally advised they have always called absent students.
- **The “Connect with Two” campaign:** All staff not currently involved in calling students were asked to volunteer to call two first-time students. Of the 616 students identified, 269 (44%) successful communications were made; the overall impression was that students appreciated the contact.
- **The Common Reader:** The College’s hallmark engagement activity, the Common Reader, continued to expand this past year, with large participation from faculty, staff, students, and community members. For example, the Common Reader was incorporated into the Student Orientation process at the Spring Valley Campus as well as “math jeopardy” in some math classes at that campus. This past year, we also surveyed our community members who attended the author visits.
- **Math Learning Communities:** Over the last few years, CMC has been focusing heavily on “barrier” courses, courses with the highest attrition rates. This past year, the math learning community model was extended to MAT 090 in Rifle and MAT 099 at Spring Valley. In the learning community between MAT 121 and MAT 101 required students to enroll in both courses as well as attend supplemental instruction for one hour per week.
- **Stop-Out Campaign:** After an analysis of student data, the college attempted to regain students who stopped attending. The specific groups called included:
 - All declared students who have accumulated 30+ credit hours
 - Declared students enrolled FA12 but not enrolled SP13
 - Declared students enrolled SU12 but not enrolled in FA12 or SP13
 - Degree seeking students with an incomplete course
 - Degree seeking students who are in good academic standing and with a financial aid hold
 - Declared students currently on academic probation or suspension
- **Mental Health Services:** These services have expanded to Leadville in a contract with Western Colorado Mental Health Center. This expands services to our students including group therapy modality, psychiatric evaluations, and psychiatric medical management.
- **Registration & Orientation Improvements:** The Leadville (Timberline) Campus has developed a new registration/advising model. New students go through a 2 1/2 hour session called “REG 101” to learn how to read a schedule, understand test scores, pre-requisites, add/drop procedures, census dates, etc., and actually build their schedule from that session. Faculty advising from this point is working with the student to develop goals, what they want to get out of the program and to plan beyond the completion of their program (pursuing a four year degree at CMC, transfer to another college, workforce, etc.) Initial faculty interaction is no longer spent simply assisting the student with course selection. The CMC New Student Online Orientation, www.mycmcsuccess.com was implemented spring 2013. The need for an online orientation was recognized during a college wide orientation program review. The orientation is geared for all CMC students and includes online learning students. It includes topics found in traditional in- person orientations as well as online

learning specific topics. It was developed with a college wide approach so it could be utilized across all campuses and all students. The orientation was created in a module format. Each module was created to engage students with video and interactive exercises. The Rifle (West Garfield) Campus implemented the "STEP" program a few years ago, and has built upon that program since the SP13 semester. Currently, the Student Affairs Team has one primary and two secondary people to meet with new students to explain the admissions and enrollment process based on where the student is at that time. This provides a face-to-face experience as well as a "point person" to contact if the student has questions during the process. In addition, there is one person who keeps a comprehensive spreadsheet on prospective students who have visited the campus or made a phone or email inquiry as well as students who have applied to the campus either in person, online, through mail, or via fax. This person calls the student between one and three times at each STEP. It truly depends on where the student is in the process, as the correct intervention at the correct time is crucial to supporting students.

- **Student Support Services (SSS):** Since its inception in the fall of 2010, CMC's Commuter SSS Project at Rifle and Edwards has, as of the summer of 2013, served over 235 students, including but not limited to the provision of over 2,500 advising and counseling hours, 1,400 tutoring hours (face-to-face and online) and some \$37,000 in direct aid. The project is currently retaining students (fall-to-fall) at a rate of approximately 64%, well above CMC's institutional average, let alone our average for at-risk students. This percentage is also 20% above the federal target for this project.
- **Upward Bound:** Upward Bound expanded to the West Garfield Campus with a tremendous first year and is already at capacity. This college-prep program serves high school students in Parachute, Rifle, Silt and New Castle. This is CMC's second Upward Bound program; a successful program has been at Leadville and Edwards for several years.

2: Institution Involvement

A: The core leadership team for this Action Project has been the "Joint Leadership Team," a group which includes the most senior leadership in Academic and Student Affairs, IR/IE, and Information Technology. This group brought the results of CCSSE and SENSE data to a joint Academic and Student Affairs Summit to design appropriate college-wide responses to improve student success. The college-wide efforts involved the "We Care" campaign by faculty and "Call Two" campaign by college staff volunteers. The entire data set and resulting benchmarked key performance indicators were shared at the president's College Leadership Team (CLT). For the Common Reader project, 14 faculty and staff members worked to select and infuse this faculty-staff engagement process. 153 others participated in the selection of the new book, "I'm Down." The book for this past year, "Ludlow," was integrated throughout the curriculum, most notably in the core student success (AAA 101) class and English composition classes. Community members were included and provided written feedback as the author of "Ludlow" spoke at all seven campuses. Students and CMC employees provided entries inspired by the Common Reader in poetry, prose, and art competition; submissions were published in the college's "Rocky Mountain Reflections" publication. The Stop-Out campaign was handled through seven Student Affairs staff, one per each campus. The Math Learning Communities involved math faculty at three campuses.

Moving forward, the new plan for engaging the institution systematically in responding to engagement and student success data involves a Response Document given to all members of the president's College Council. By following a regular schedule, the college can better assure that student success initiatives enter the college's late fall planning and budgeting cycle.

3: Next Steps

A: The college has begun a new comprehensive strategic planning cycle. The planning cycle is in sync with the college's seven year AQIP Reaffirmation cycle. Once the college receives its Systems Appraisal feedback, a decision may be made to retire this Action Project. As student success is core to CMC's mission, and student engagement is critical, it is anticipated that another student success initiative will be instituted. CMC will likely expand the use of learning communities, supplemental instruction and other student support as continuous improvement tools towards student success. The math learning community syllabus template and model is one that is being used to implement a major Developmental Education Redesign, mandated by the State of Colorado. Given the significant positive impact CMC's efforts on Barrier Courses, it is likely that the college will continue to expand to other courses and campuses. Already a team of faculty and staff is working to design a major Title III grant. Given that consistency in student support across campuses is a challenge in our seven campus system, the college is also exploring ways to systematically promote common student support via a Virtual Student Center (VSC), a "smart" student portal populated with many student success modules to aid in the service of students at smaller campuses or in the evening. Also, a VSC would help CMC promote relevant support to students based on their status in the student information system.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: CMC has found that focusing on barrier courses yields significant success in student retention. In particular, the math learning

community initiative showed measured progress. It was launched after significant AQIP research and planning in the FA09 semester with a learning community between MAT 121 and MAT 101. Students were required to enroll in both courses as well as attend supplemental instruction one hour per week on the opposite day as their MAT 101 class. Results from the first pilot were studied and improvement made for the second iteration, which took place in the FA semester 2010. These improvements included a revision of the common skills for both courses, inclusion of a learning resources requirement of 5 hours of tutoring outside of the class, and programming of the classes in a four day a week schedule rather than two day a week block schedule. Significant results were achieved with these continuous improvements. The number of students who scored less than 65% on their first exam and passed the class increased significantly from the FA09 semester (47.7%) to the FA10 semester (76.9%).

5: Project Challenges

- A:**
- **Smart Use of Student Portals:** One of the greatest challenges for Colorado Mountain College is to provide consistent supplemental support across all campuses and locations. Colleges, including CMC, have student portals which originally promised to provide great customized resources for students. It seems that portals, anywhere, are not being used by students to any significant extent. The online registration feature need not be a part of the portal. Are there any HLC colleges that use their portals robustly for providing tutoring modules, for posting relevant student materials based on where the student information systems indicates where they are in the pipeline (e.g., prospect, applicant, first-time student, etc.)?
 - **Widespread and Effective Use of Learning Software:** Another challenge relates to the pairing of student success software with particular barrier courses, particularly those in developmental education. Colleges typically use Plato, My Foundations Lab, Khan Academy and a few other products and it appears that none of them have clear mappings to unit materials and assessments that allow for ease of conducting mastery learning. It would be helpful to know about HLC colleges that have widespread mastery learning systems that use software effectively (and not just anecdotally in a few classes) to remediate students once they hit a learning barrier.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

- A:**
- Colorado Mountain College should be commended on its project accomplishments and status in light of its ranking in the top twenty among eight hundred community colleges in a CNN survey having to do with student academic success. It is apparent that the College recognizes the importance of addressing issues, launching initiatives to improve, and assessing progress by analyzing longitudinal data. Recent survey results suggest that CMC has been successful in advancing academic and student support services to such extent that the institution is nearly reaching its stated goals. Moreover, clear evidence of ongoing work in developmental education to account for deficiencies revealed in survey results is noteworthy. In future academic years, the College may find it useful to employ the design and method found in this Action Project as a model for other institutional endeavors.
- The institution is making reasonable progress toward completion of the project and development of an institution-wide continuous quality improvement culture. The College is to be commended for the thoughtful approach taken during this project. It is evident that a great deal of care has been taken to understand the issues, including the centrality of these to the institutional mission. It is also evident that there was significant engagement of institutional stakeholders, and that the results of stakeholder input are being carefully considered. (AQIP Category 3 – Understanding Students' and other Stakeholders' Needs; AQIP Category 7 – Measuring Effectiveness)
- On a side note, CMC reports that in certain cases (eg. "Rate of Attempted/Completed Credits") a significant improvement was noted. One wonders what "significant" means in this case and others of similar record. It may be helpful in future reports of this kind to explain this level of accomplishment in more detail.

2: Institution Involvement

- A:** CMC clearly understands the importance of institutional involvement. Terms like "joint," "college-wide," and "key performance indicators" jump off the page. Continued progress is likely in view of the College's plan to collect data and analyze results in future

semesters.

3: Next Steps

- A: Few institutions have the necessary vision to bridge an initial Action Project with a sequel to it. Aligning this project and one that may follow with a new comprehensive institutional plan is an excellent way to continue to focus attention on student success and engagement. There is also evidence that CMC recognizes the importance of seeking grant opportunities and exploring technical support for its programming in this area.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

- A: Many community colleges struggle with preparing students to meet challenges students face in math curricula in higher education. The fact that CMC is making progress in this regard and has empirical data to demonstrate such success is especially commendable. This component of CMC's Action Project is clearly an example of a best practice.

5: Project Challenges

- A: It is apparent that the College is making excellent progress in this Action Project. Furthermore, it is evident that CMC realizes that benchmarking with other institutions may be an effective way to continue to improve. While this reviewer doesn't have an answer to the question about colleges that use portals in tutoring modules and other learning software, CMC is respectfully advised to consider using list-serve avenues in Colorado and throughout the country to find out more about such academic assistance resources. In addition, of course, HLC offers considerable information available on its website for further review.

Project Outcome

1: REASON FOR COMPLETION

- A: All goals were met. Colorado Mountain College was commended by the reviewers on this project's accomplishments and status. The College was ranked in the top 20 among 800 community colleges in a CNN survey having to do with student academic success.

2: SUCCESS FACTORS

- A: "It is apparent that the College recognizes the importance of addressing issues, launching initiatives to improve, and assessing progress by analyzing longitudinal data." was the comment by an AQIP reviewer. One of CMC's hallmark ways of addressing student success is through providing extra support for barrier courses. This was a successful outcome of the action project where students in barrier courses demonstrated

3: UNSUCCESSFUL FACTORS

- A: The transitional leadership. The college experienced having several different leaders move in and out of the student affairs department over the course of this project. This slowed the progress of the project.