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Colorado Mountain College: Creating an Environment that Promotes Student Engagement and Success.

PROJECT

UPDATE

REVIEW

REVIEWED

 VERSION 1.0

Create a new version of this Action Project.

Project Details			
Title	Creating an Environment that Promotes Student Engagement and Success.		Status REVIEWED
Category	1-Helping Students Learn		Updated 09-14-2010
Timeline			Reviewed 10-03-2010
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	Target Completion	06-30-2012	Last Modified 10-03-2010

VERSIONS

 [VERSION 1.0](#)

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

- A:
- CMC’s comprehensive assessment design “Assessing the Student Experience in 3-D” has been shared with Faculty Senate, Student Affairs Council, Instructional Leadership Team, College Leadership Team and various other constituencies throughout the district. This model presents the dimension of student engagement within the context of student learning and success.
  - At the annual in-service in May, Inventory I of the Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs(ACPA) – “*Good practice in student affairs engages students in active learning*” was administered to professional staff... Results revealed that the greatest need for improvement for the division is “**Stating the mission and goals for out-of-classroom activities as learning outcomes.** Six teams have established learning outcomes and assessment plans for co-curricular programs in student affairs. These projects will be monitored and assessed via the Accountability Management System in TaskStream.
  - One such program with college wide implications is our common reader program now in its fourth year. Learning outcomes, activities and assessment measures have been established for this initiative to be used in measuring its effectiveness as an engagement strategy. Of particular interest is an electronic venue that will allow students across 7 campuses and 12,000 square miles to interact with one another concerning the book and the author’s presentations. Also a literary and photo contest has been added this year as an additional engagement strategy.
  - Academic affairs and student affairs partnered to provide a common professional development opportunity focused on student engagement and success by sponsoring 36 instructional and student affairs staff to attend the Annual Conference on First Year

Experience. George Kuh, renowned expert on student engagement, in his keynote address provided our team with the background, context and definition for engagement that continues to guide our efforts. Best practices from around the country were collected and discussed for applicability to CMC.

- The third administration of CCSSE at CMC was conducted this past spring. These results have been combined with previous results from 2005 and 2007 and trend data was presented at the Fall Faculty in-service and to other leadership teams. CMC showed steady improvement on each of the five benchmarks over the 3 CCSSE administrations. Significant improvements in engagement were noted in CMC's full-time student population compared to cohort colleges. Top 10% performance levels were also presented and ventured as an aspirational goal for our college in order to support the college's vision to become the "first choice" in its communities. The Institutional Balanced Scorecard now incorporates items from CCSSE as key performance indicators measuring the student experience.
- New student orientation at CMC completed a comprehensive program review process with representation from every campus. Utilizing data from the Fall 2009 Survey of Entering Student Engagement, learning outcomes and objectives are being drafted to address needed improvements in our multiple formats for orienting new students to our college and campuses. In particular, data revealed a need to motivate students to engage in learning labs and tutorials during the first three weeks of the semester.
- Data from the initial administration of the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) has also been compiled and presented to multiple audiences. This information provides baseline perceptual data from beginning students on key early engagement opportunities. The initial student focus group for follow-up was held in September 2010. Preliminary analysis of this report by the new Student Affairs Leadership Team (old SAC) has already revealed areas for needed improvement to be addressed in the 2010/11 academic year. Further, the new charter adopted in July by this team incorporates in its guiding principles a strong commitment to accountability for student engagement and success.
- Results from an AQIP action team pilot initiative to improve student performance in "barrier courses" have been analyzed. College algebra was delivered in a learning community format coupled with Enhanced Mathematics Support. 29% of the students in the control group who scored less than 65% on the first exam passed the course compared to 43% of the students in the pilot cohort. While the overall goal of increasing the percentage of students completing the course with a C or better was missed, much was learned from the pilot that will be incorporated into the Fall 2010 offering. In particular, two students who were paired with a high performing student both went on to pass the course. The idea of peer tutoring and supplemental instruction are improvements integrated into the Fall 2010 model currently underway.
- CMC was awarded two, five year federal Student Support Services grants for \$2.35 million. The original grant at the three residential

campuses was extended due to their surpassing federal objectives. The second grant which utilized total quality improvement practices from the original grant was expanded to two commuter sites. This of course increases our capacity to support student success especially among at risk populations.

**R:** This far-reaching and important Action Project focuses on understanding and meeting the needs of students and making improvements based on recommendations made in the 2009 System Appraisal Feedback report. CMC has made great strides in the area of collecting and analyzing data and is making improvements based on findings. The College's effort to reach out to students and promote student engagement across the miles is really impressive! Especially worth noting is the common reader program which promotes best practices by encouraging student leaning and interaction and serves as a basis for assessment activities. The College has also demonstrated Agility, which is a Principle of High Performance Organizations, in that it is willing to make adjustments when improvement efforts don't pan out. A case in point is the focus on fostering improved student performance in "barrier courses". In addition to aligning this project with AQIP Category (1), Helping Students Learn, CMC has also made an effort to incorporate components that are consistent with Category (2), Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives, Category (7), Measuring Effectiveness, and Category (8), Planning Continuous Improvement. Additionally, CMC has focused on building and maintaining Collaboration which is an important Principle of High Performance Organizations. While the College has been successful in the aforementioned areas and secured funding to support its continued efforts, CMC faces the challenge of keeping the momentum going on all of its campuses which are located at considerable distances from one another. It is advisable to maintain a consistent effort to provide updates to constituents, encourage frequent meetings, and enlist the help of students as is mentioned in the "challenge" portion of this update.

## 2: Institution Involvement

**A:** The above accomplishments make it clear that multiple college constituencies and teams have been involved in adopting a philosophical, practical and data-driven framework for creating an environment that promotes engagement and success.

Furthermore, an assessment summit was held with participation from across the college that included campus and district administrators, student affairs staff, faculty etc. Participants were asked to brainstorm relevant indicators that they believe are valid measures that build to student success. This list was refined down to 11 key performance indicators. A template was developed as a collaborative effort between student affairs and institutional research. This template was populated with three years of data in order to establish baseline performance for the college and each campus. Dialogue meetings were held on each campus that included administrators, faculty and staff for the purpose of raising awareness on our performance on these indicators as well as CCSSE. These 11 key performance indicators located on the Student

Progress Report and the Balanced Scorecard provide the college wide focal point each semester for marking student progress and success both collectively and by cohort.

**R:** CMC has made a concerted effort to gather input from a broad range of constituents in order to determine key performance indicators. This practice shows attention has been paid to Involvement which is a Principle of High Performance Organizations.

**3: Next Steps**

**A:** Establish targets for both campus and college performance on the 11 key student performance indicators.

Fully implement and assess the six projects on engaging students in active learning with recommendations for improvements.

Initiate minimally seven more of these projects, one on each campus across the college in 2010/11.

Hold individual information sessions on each campus to address results and implications from CCSSE and SENSE.

Select benchmarks and/or individual items from CCSSE/SENSE to improve college wide.

Create baseline data for new engagement strategies associated with the common reader as well as conduct assessment on related learning outcomes.

Do comparative analysis on results from “barrier course” strategy.

Develop and conduct assessment plans relative to changes in orientation.

Execute assessment plans, analyze and use results for successive iterations of all strategies and projects conducted in 2010/11.

**R:** The challenge for the College as it moves forward with this Action Project will be to maintain support for all of these built-in initiatives. Perhaps it would be in the best interest of the College to build on the initiatives that have already been established instead of beginning too many new projects. It is important for the key participants to stay on task, using findings related to these projects to conduct further assessment activities and promote improvement initiatives. In other words, the College should avoid the potential for weighing itself down with too many projects, which might result in an inability to work toward accomplishing its original goals. Furthermore, by staying focused on fewer initiatives, the College is more likely to ensure continued buy-in and prevent fatigue.

**4: Resulting Effective Practices**

Creating a simple visual image that represents our comprehensive

**A:** assessment system has created a wonderful point of reference for establishing a common vision and easy to use overview. This visual depicts three spheres representing the three dimensions of assessment include learning, success and engagement. Assessment instruments are associated with the appropriate sphere.

Including a significant and equal number of instructional and student affairs staff in a professional development experience focused on student success catalyzed our commitment to collaboration, provided exposure to a multitude of best practices, enhanced our common language and strengthened essential relationships.

Finally, a joint leadership team made up of both academic and student affairs administrators has expedited the college's response to opportunities revealed in the Systems Appraisal. This team has met regularly this past Spring semester to study the report, follow-up on recommendations resulting from the Strategy Forum, analyze data together and facilitate timely change in a coherent way as exemplified in action project development. This visible and strong commitment to collaboration "at the top" has become a hallmark strength at CMC.

**R:** Fostering collaboration is definitely a "hallmark strength" at CMC! The accomplishments mentioned above could not have been possible without this spirit of collaboration.

**5: Project Challenges**

- A:**
- Using data regularly and systematically to shape and evaluate strategy has been a challenge but is increasingly becoming the focus with the balanced score card and other measures
  - Both institutional and national surveys like The Chronicle's Great Colleges to Work For Survey have revealed that communicating effectively across the distances of our district is a challenge. New leadership structures established this summer and increased emphasis on accountability should help to improve this dynamic.
  - Utilizing students as fellow architects in developing engagement strategies and assessment system is being encouraged
  - Involving students in greater numbers to collect feedback has been a challenge but we are collaborating better with other functional areas and campuses to help improve this

**R:** It is clear that CMC recognizes its challenges in areas of data use and communication and has taken measures to overcome these obstacles. Creating a balanced score card and establishing a new leadership structure will help to mitigate these problems. One of the more difficult tasks, faced by many Colleges and Universities nationwide, is engaging students in assessment activities. Providing incentives and conducting course-embedded activities are ways to overcome this problem. Also, learning communities and other cohort groups that have a close connection to the College and a vested interest in and

understanding of why it is important to see the College succeed in meeting students' needs are more likely to provide valuable information.