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Colorado Mountain College: Improving the Bachelor's Degree Implementation

PROJECT

UPDATE

REVIEW

REVIEWED

 **VERSION 1.0**

Project Details			
Title		Status	
Improving the Bachelor's Degree Implementation		REVIEWED	
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Create a new version of this Action Project.

VERSIONS

 **VERSION 1.0**

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: Over the past year, we have continued to learn from the development and implementation of our first two bachelor's degrees. Based on feedback from constituents, we have engrafted improvements to the existing degrees for fall 2012, as well as applied what we have learned to the development of the next bachelor's degrees (e.g. Bachelor of Applied Science, Nursing & Teacher Education) and supporting our two year degrees. The Quality Team, which provides oversight for college wide continuous improvement and recommendations to the College Leadership Team, has continued to oversee processes related the development and implementation of bachelor's degrees.

The major AQIP Category impacted by this project is Planning Continuous Improvement. However, as will be evident by the following initiatives that were undertaken during the past year, the AQIP Leading & Communicating, along with Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives categories were impacted as well.

Unlike the previous CMC strategic plan which was already underway when starting the bachelor's degrees was initially proposed, we have developed a 2012-15 CMC Strategic Plan that better reflects our focus on bachelor's and associate's degrees. Although CMC's previous Vision & Mission remain: to become a first choice college and to create a better future for our students, employees and communities, respectively; there are five new strategic focus areas: transformational experiences for our students and employees, transformational experiences and growth for our communities & partnerships, transformational growth for our enrollment and programs. An accompanying 2012-15 Balanced Score Card 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. Also, we continue to work on tying our zero based budgeting process to the strategic plan and balanced

score card KPIs.

Feedback was gathered on the implementation of our first two bachelor's degrees (Bachelor's of Science in Business Administration or BSBA & Bachelor of Arts in Sustainability Studies or BASS during the 2011-12 academic year via student, faculty & staff focus groups and surveys. The majority of students and faculty expressed satisfaction the bachelor's programs. There was pride associated with being a part of the first bachelor's classes. Some suggestions for improvement of these classes were: improve the college's Interactive Video System (IVS-used to extend the offering of some of these classes to all our campuses that are spread out over 12,000 square miles in the mountains of Western Colorado) or reduce reliance on it and provide better training for instructors using IVS; expand the use of internship type experiences; increase the availability of classes; improve advising, with clear pathways to graduation and hire more faculty. CMC has proceeded to address all of these concerns for the 2012-13 academic year.

Assessment was incorporated as part of the new bachelor's degree programs. The BSBA and BASS have had an increase from 9 courses assessed in 2011-12 to 26 courses assessed for fall 2012. Assessments tied to our other two AQIP Projects-Creating an Effective Accountability System for Institutional, Program & Course Level Assessment and Creating an Environment That Promotes Student Engagement & Success contribute this project as well. For example, CMC has steadily improved its scores on the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) benchmarks typically administered every two years. The college's goal is to be amongst the top 10 percent of the CCSSE cohort. Based on the CCSSE 2012 data for CMC, we are approaching that goal on the Active & Collaborative Learning and Student-Faculty Interaction benchmarks. By comparison, the other three benchmarks: Student Effort, Academic Challenge and Support for Learners are a relative challenge for us at this time. Similarly, on the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE), CMC is approaching its goal of being in the top performing colleges on the benchmarks of Early Connections and Clear Academic Plan & Pathway. However, the other four benchmarks are not as far along.

For the first two bachelor's degrees, we had only a couple of months to promote and recruit following HLC approval of the degrees in spring 2011. This was insufficient, since we were slated to offer our first bachelor's classes that fall. This was reflected in the lower fall bachelor's enrollment. However, having had a year to market and recruit for these degrees and get the four-year branding out there, 2012-13 is a different story with 91 FTE year-to-date compared with 69 for all of 2011-12.

CMC has contributed significantly to economies of the area it serves by helping to develop human capital, being a major employer and through its numerous community & business partnerships. According to the economic impact study conducted this summer, CMC directly and indirectly provided 1,178 jobs within its service area, \$46 million in earnings and \$65 million in regional economic impact. Furthermore, CMC accounted for over \$102 million in statewide economic output. These data are supportive of CMC's Mission. Consequently, the community has been an enthusiastic supporter of our bachelor's (and associate's) degrees.

The President hired a leadership trainer last spring to work with the leadership on improving college wide leading & communicating which is a bigger challenge than the norm for this college due to the vastness of the area it serves. The college leadership spent six months trying to improve their leadership style. Also, over the past summer, an AQIP Team has been targeting the improvement of college wide communication related processes.

It was recommended by AQIP that CMC share how it developed and implemented its first bachelor's degrees using continuous improvement methodology with others, particularly at the state and national level. We have done just that since this project was submitted. Our employees have recently presented a paper on meeting the community college mission while adding bachelor's degrees at the Community College Baccalaureate Association, League for innovations, Higher Learning Commission and Society of College & University Planning annual meetings regarding the adding of the bachelor's degrees while continuing to meet the community college mission. Our presentations generated interest and were well received.

R: The College is making reasonable progress in its attempt to improve the implementation of the Bachelor degrees. The development of strategic goals and key performance indicators (KPIs) that more closely reflect the College's direction is well supported by AQIP Category Eight: Planning Continuous Improvement.

The College appears to understand the potential complexity of this project and may wish to create specific objectives to provide focus and assessment measures. Evidence is lacking as to whether the planned changes based on faculty, staff, and student feedback are in alignment with the new strategic goals. Additionally, it is not clear if the leadership challenges are directly related to the new Bachelor degrees or part of a College-wide challenge. The opportunity exists for the College to make sustainable, continued progress by strategically focusing on performance improvement (AQIP Category Seven: Measuring Effectiveness).

2: Institution Involvement

A: The Quality and College Leadership Teams helped garner college wide involvement by not only keeping employees and students informed about CMC's progress with the bachelor's degrees, but by getting their input on how the degrees were developed and implemented. This was also accomplished via the numerous college wide committees and sub-committees that addressed the various phases of the development and implementation processes e.g. recruiting, admissions, capacity of libraries, student support etc.

From the beginning, internal and external stakeholders took ownership of the college's bachelor's degrees, especially our current and potential students. They expressed great enthusiasm for these degrees and were dedicated to helping to develop and implement them.

R: The College is to be commended for ensuring representation from internal and external stakeholders as part of this collaborative effort. A solid understanding of all stakeholders' needs is important to the success of the project.

3: Next Steps

A: We shall continue to study our progress on existing bachelor's degrees and improve them as needed. We shall also continue to work on the development of the next bachelor's degrees.

Nine college wide AQIP Category Teams are currently working on updating CMC's Systems Portfolio. This update will also document the development and implementation of the bachelor's degrees.

CMC would like to retire this project later this fall, since its goals have either been accomplished or are progressing well. This project has positively impacted the AQIP categories targeted by it i.e. Planning Continuous Improvement by affecting how the college conducted the 2012-15 as well as how CMC will plan for 2015 and beyond; Leading & Communicating by helping to improve college wide communication and an AQIP Team is currently studying college wide communication practices; and Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives by the college's contribution to the communities it serves as evidenced by the results of recent economic impact data.

R: Continued study and resulting improvements for existing Bachelor's degree programs are logical next steps. It appears that the results of this project have led to other continuous improvement initiatives as evidenced by improvement in communication efforts (AQIP Category Five: Leading and Communicating). Evaluation of the entire project is also an important next step and serves as an effective practice.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: One of the 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.

This project has been a great example of how continuous improvement teams can be utilized to effectively study and improve processes, as well as engage people e.g. the Quality Team's 16 One College Teams that addressed key aspects of the development and implementation of the bachelor's degrees (e.g. marketing, recruiting, budgeting, facilities, advising/counseling, etc.) helped develop the first bachelor's degrees, the Communications AQIP Team currently addressing college communication practices, the Budget Review Committee that is working on providing recommendations for improving how the college allocates resources and the nine AQIP Category Teams currently working on updating CMC's

Systems Portfolio.

R: The College is to be commended for making progress in the areas of communication (AQIP Category Five: Leading and Communicating) and the engagement of continuous improvement teams with improving processes. The targeted effort of improvement in communication is in alignment with the College's goal to share lessons learned with other institutions.

5: Project Challenges

A: The biggest challenge has been the tight timeline under which bachelor's degrees were created and implemented. We have learned that taking the necessary time to market, recruit, etc. for any new degrees is absolutely critical.

In addition, even though the college has conducted numerous focus groups and surveys with employees (students as well) over the past 5 years and tried to address issues that arose, effective college wide communication and collaboration continue to pose challenges for us. Consequently, we are continuing to work on improving related processes. For example, there is Communications AQIP Team that is studying college communication practices and this group will soon offer its recommendations for improvement to the college leadership.

R: Planning is important to the success of any initiative. The College has demonstrated an understanding of the need to evaluate current processes and make improvements for continued progress. Communication has been identified as an area in of focus. With this in mind, the College may wish to consult best practices from peer institutions with similar geographical challenges.