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

PROJECT

UPDATE

REVIEW

REVIEWED



VERSION 3.0

Create a new version of this Action Project.

VERSIONS

[VERSION 3.0](#)

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Project Details

<b>Title</b>	Creating an Environment that Promotes Student Engagement and Success.	<b>Status</b>	REVIEWED
<b>Category</b>	1-Helping Students Learn	<b>Updated</b>	09-28-2012
<b>Timeline</b>		<b>Reviewed</b>	10-14-2012
<b>Planned Project Kickoff</b>	05-01-2010	<b>Created</b>	03-26-2010
<b>Target Completion</b>	06-30-2012	<b>Last Modified</b>	10-14-2012

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: Specific accomplishments of the past year include:

- An inventory of assessment activities in co-curricular programs college wide has been conducted and assimilated into a common template
- The status of assessment plans for each program has been established
- College wide programs with systematic and regular assessment plans include:
  - Common Reader
  - Orientation
  - Learning Communities
  - Disability services
  - Residence life
  - Student Affairs leadership team performance
  - Counseling services
  - Student Support Services
  - Upward Bound
  - Resident Assistant training
  - New student registration
  - Mental health services
- The successful learning community model to address student performance in barrier courses has been expanded to additional campuses.
- Both a feasibility study and program review of residential life have been conducted yielding recommendations to improve engagement levels of on campus students with implementation underway.
- Two new Early Connection Campaigns have been created and

deployed prior to SENSE assessment this fall semester 2012

- The common reader program as a college wide engagement initiative was deepened yet again this year to include a “common documentary film” corresponding to the selected verse novel based on events of Colorado history.

## Current Status

This project was conceived and initiated in the Spring of 2010 with a target completion date of June 2012. While “creating an environment that promotes student success and engagement” is “The Never-ending Story”, a culture resolved to write that story has been created at Colorado Mountain College. It’s a culture that has effectively bridged the gap between academic and student affairs to focus on the student experience from a holistic and integrated perspective. After three years of highly collaborative efforts recognized by the HLC as a “hallmark strength” at CMC, academic and student affairs have been organizationally united to create a cohesive and singular focus on student learning, engagement and success. Within this new administrative structure, we more fully demonstrate our long term commitment to being a learning college of excellence.

Beyond this new blended accountability structure, the culture manifests its collective commitment to student learning, engagement and success in several ways:

- A shared commitment exists to address CMC’s signature learning outcomes.
- Student affairs has adopted the Council for the Advancement of Standards/Learning Reconsidered Integrated Learning Outcomes in assessing and developing programs. This year, an exciting new pilot introduces emotional intelligence in a student success course to address the CAS outcomes in the domains of intra- and interpersonal skill development.
- Academic and student affairs utilize a common assessment platform (TaskStream) for assessment planning and evaluation.
- The college is in its fourth administration of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). CCSSE data reflect continuous improvement on all five benchmarks over the four administrations. CMC exceeded the 2012 CCSSE cohort on two benchmarks: Active & Collaborative Learning and Student-Faculty Interaction and is also approaching the CCSSE 2012 Top-Performing Colleges on these same benchmarks, however it will take more time to achieve this level of success on the other three benchmarks.
- The college is in its second administration of the Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE). CMC scored very high on SENSE’s Early Connections benchmark during the last administration and could possibly make it into the top 10% of the SENSE cohort this fall on this benchmark. CMC also scored higher than the cohort on three other SENSE benchmarks: Clear Academic Plan & Pathway, Engaged Learning and Academic & Social Support. The other two benchmarks: High Expectations & Aspirations and Effective Track to College Readiness were a little below the cohort.

- Regular and ongoing evaluation of this engagement data by combined meetings of institutional effectiveness, academic and student affairs leaders is well established.
- Program development and design of interventions are based on this review of engagement data. The past summer review of the data created "Connect with Two", a call campaign to new freshman, and "Faculty Care and Connect" where students receive a contact from their instructor if absent more than once. These two strategies were conceived as a strengths based approach to capitalize on CMC's high benchmark score in Early Connections on the most recent SENSE results.
- A common set of student success indicators in the Balanced Scorecard and Student Progress Report are well established and reviewed collectively and systematically.
- The major theme of the 2012-2015 CMC Strategic Plan is "Creating Transformational Experiences for Students" with objectives that address the critical areas of student engagement and goal attainment. Multiple teams are involved in implementing strategies related to each component.

**R:** Colorado Mountain College has developed a strategic plan with a focus upon the student. This focus includes outcomes, engagement, persistence and creating an environment that supports and is conducive to the success of the student. It is evident that the institution has created a culture that permeates all aspects of the institution - academics, student support, residential life and counseling. It seems simplistic to say there is a focus on the student but the impact of such a focus results in many positive outcomes for both the institution and more importantly, the student. A comprehensive and holistic approach to improving student outcomes and success through direct involvement is commendable and worth noting. The use of data that transcends multiple offices and that can be used to answer and address multiple concerns is an effective and efficient strategy. As you continue this process you may find ways to reduce the number of surveys and evaluation tools for a more streamlined approach.

**2: Institution Involvement**

**A:** The number of people and teams engaged in this project has grown exponentially since its inception. It has involved the highest levels of leadership with the AQIP Quality Team and the College Strategic Planning Committee providing oversight and integration for major college directions as well as alignment with national, regional and state objectives. In addition, the Joint Leadership Team of academic and student affairs manage the collective efforts aimed at improving student success and engagement. The Student Affairs Leadership Team, along with their counterpart The Instructional Leadership Team, both with representation from each campus, coordinate the deployment and management of related efforts across all campuses. Various other teams and committees at both the college and campus level lead specific initiatives i.e. Common Reader Committee, Residence Life Council, Assessment Committee, etc. Finally, faculty members teaching in the learning community format are now a collaborative force comparing best

practices and serving as trainers for other faculty new to the approach.

**R:** The involvement and participation of all vested stakeholders is critical to the success of any project. The use of one major committee is a plus since this is an expansive level of involvement. It seems that what began as a strategy for improving student engagement has now grown to consider many other areas and offices at the institution. This is to be expected since one cannot operate in isolation or expect that one change will not impact other areas. The identification of the scope of the initial project in light of current strategies is accurate; however, you are to be highly commended for sustained effort and strategic planning in the evaluation of programs with a focus on student outcomes.

**3: Next Steps**

**A:** As mentioned previously, it is our consensus belief that this project has succeeded in creating a fairly sophisticated culture dedicated to creating an environment that promotes student engagement and success (AQIP Category most impacted by this project: Helping Students Learn). The college has now incorporated this action project as a central theme in its 2012-15 strategic plan styled "Creating Transformational Experiences for Our Students". Embedded solidly as it is in college planning for the foreseeable future, it is recommended we retire this project having accomplished its purpose. It is suggested that another project more precise in scope be launched to address a critical need correlated to improving student engagement and/or success.

**R:** The continuous cycle of improvement is ongoing and requires proactive approaches. The institution has established a solid foundation for which to grow and improve the quality and outcomes of educational experiences for students. The development of new projects that extend the current work, refine the processes, and establish new strategies is a commendable outcome that builds on the earlier project successes. It is worth noting that the institution is not stagnate nor resting on current successes but rather focused upon how to take what was learned and use it to continually move the institution forward.

**4: Resulting Effective Practices**

**A:**

- Unification of academic and student affairs efforts informed by common data sets and focused on common outcomes
- Establishing comprehensive inventories of all programs with assessment status of each
- Staying with any project through its third iteration
- Utilizing college wide teams to develop and implement assessments of engagement and student success
- Keeping common data sets in front of enterprise leaders to create vision and focus
- Being focused on changing a culture adaptive to changes in

strategy and practice
<p><b>R:</b></p> <p>The development of practices that are uniform and used across multiple platforms is an efficient strategy and a good use of resources. By doing this, the institution has critically evaluated what data is accurately needed to inform and make changes. Rather than being reactive the institution has been proactive in addressing needed changes through a systemic approach. This culture will only serve to benefit the student, improve outcomes, and develop programs of quality.</p>

<p><b>5: Project Challenges</b></p>
<p><b>A:</b></p> <p>In hindsight, this project may have been too expansive in scope for a three year outcome. However, the comprehensive nature of this effort created a culture and frame of reference that is profound, namely that student engagement, student learning, and student success are inseparable. Perhaps our greatest challenge in moving forward is to create innovative structures and systems mindful of this truth and responsive to the totality and integrated nature of the student experience.</p>
<p><b>R:</b></p> <p>Colorado Mountain College has reflected upon the initial scope of the project and the level of work required by initiating such efforts. While engagement, learning, and success may be used interchangeably they are different constructs and require specific efforts. Similar outcomes may exist across all areas but the needs and strategies for success are different. The institution has made accurate observations as to the scope and nature of the project but also stayed with the efforts despite the challenges that systemic change requires. Other institutions can learn from the lessons this institution experienced in taking on such a project and being highly successful despite the challenges.</p> <p>The institution has achieved an exceptional accomplishment through this project and its work represents an “outstanding practice” that ought to be shared with other higher education institutions.</p>