The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Minneapolis Community and Technical College

Project Details

Title	Improvement of Processes through Analysis of Student Complaints	**Status**	COMPLETED
Category	3-Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs	**Updated**	09-13-2010
Timeline		**Reviewed**	10-05-2010
Planned Project Kickoff	03-01-2010	**Created**	03-05-2010
Actual Completion	08-31-2010	**Version**	1

1: Project Goal

A:

- Categorize student complaints
- Establish a systematic approach to student complaints
- Identify metrics and data sources for analysis of improvement

2: Reasons For Project

A: In 2009, an Action Project Team examined and investigated common patterns of student complaints. In addition, the team made a recommendation for collecting analyzing, and resolving the student complaints in a systematic way. However the recommendation was rejected. Therefore, the new objective is to reconvene an action project team to explore other systematic approaches and to establish a method or program to categorize complaints and ensure data is used by departments/units to improve processes and reduce complaints.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: Academic Affairs, Business Services, Counseling & Advising, Facilities, Judicial Affairs, Legal Affairs, Public Safety, and Student Affairs

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A:

- Categorize student complaints to assess student and stakeholder needs
- Categorize student complaints for the purpose of evaluating current processes
- Identify a program design for a systematic student complaint process, including a feedback function to close the loop

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: This project will be completed within five (5) months of inception. The activities to accomplish this project include:

Activity I
Identify current student complaint categories

Activity II
Design a process to aid in categorizing student complaints and ensure routine analysis of complaints by type or category

Activity III
Develop a systematic student complaint process that includes reporting to responsible departments and College leaders

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: Judicial Affairs staff and the Vice President for Strategy, Planning, and Accountability will review progress to ensure that the action project continues to remain focused and committed.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A:

1. Definitions and a data management process will be designed to categorize student complaints
2. An action plan will be established for a systematic student complaint process

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The committee responsible for this action project kicked off on March 11, 2010 and have met bi-weekly through August 26, 2010. During the past six months the committee accomplished the following:

Examine and investigate the common patterns of student complaints. This process involved members collecting data and information in regard to student complaints campus wide. Members found a lack of quantitative data available for committee review. Many offices and departments do not collect or maintain student complaint data. Records were available from Academic Affairs, Judicial Affairs, Legal Affairs, and Public Safety. The committee was able to determine the top five (5) common patterns of student complaints as: Academic Environment, College Procedures, Customer Service, Employee Performance, and Inaccurate Information.

Categorize student complaints. This process involved members categorizing all probable student complaint varieties explored by the committee. The committees then grouped the complaints into College areas and/or departments responsible for responding to the complaints.

Identify metrics and data sources for analysis of improvement. The committee explored other institutions of higher education student complaint practices and best practices of organizations managing consumer complaints. The committee agreed that evaluating practices at the College through student complaints can assist us in analyzing stake holder needs. It should be a priority to increase documentation of student concerns and complaints and for the College to spend more time understanding student dissatisfaction. To better capture and analyze what students are telling us we need a better way to collect all complaints, the ability to respond to complaints quickly and effectively, a method for plotting complaints on a scale to measure severity of complaints and frequency of complaints to expose the origin of student dissatisfaction. The committee also reported a need to identify and implement changes that would prevent reoccurring complaints. Without a structure for feedback from our students, there is a lack of accountability. One of the many challenges faced by the committee was the lack of data. Therefore, the committee has recommended that the College develop an on-line complaint process that will collect the data to assist in analyzing.

Identify a program design for a systematic complaint process. Committee members collectively agreed that the student complaint process used by Central New Mexico Community College (CNMCC) would best fit MCTC needs. CNMCC defines a complaint as a written concern or formal charge of dissatisfaction with a person, service, or process that requires clarification, investigation, and resolution. Complaints are then distributed to two levels: Level 1 Complaint - A verbal complaint that is resolved, this level is not tracked, and Level 2 - A written complaint based upon the complaint definition that requires a student's signature, this level of complaint is tracked to ensure action is taken. Please see CNMCC site: http://www.cnm.edu/depts/deanstud/studentcomplaintdet.php

There are exclusions to the Student Complaint Process. These exclusions include grade appeals, complaints of discrimination/sexual harassment, or any student to student complaints. In these situations, students are given an on-line form to complete and turn into the Dean of Students for processing. When the complaint is received, it is then forwarded to the appropriate individual to review and address the issue. After the concern has been addressed, the student receives a letter documenting the receipt and review of their complaint.

2: Institution Involvement

A: The following departments were involved as members in this action project: Financial Aid, Judicial Affairs, Academic Affairs, Business Services, Counseling and Advising, Admissions, Public Safety, and Legal Affairs. Members communicated weekly and met bi-weekly. Awareness was built into many areas on campus regarding the need for a systematic student complaint process. This was specifically expressed in the Academic Affairs Office and Student Service areas. The committee has learned that student complaints have been addressed but not recorded or handled systematically.

3: Next Steps

A: The Committee has identified several critical steps required to move forward with this action project:

1) The College review and update its current Student Complaint and Grievance Policy 4.10 and 4.10.01 - the policy was last reviewed and updated on July 1, 1999: http://www.minneapolis.edu/collegepolicies/policy.cfm?policy_id=67. The process will include committee review, policy development, student input, faculty input, and cabinet approval.
2) An online method be designed for students to file complaints and receive feedback from appropriate areas. The Committee recommends using a program similar to the current "Ask us" platform. This will involve planning and design from the Information Technology Department,
3) An area or department of the College needs to be responsible for overseeing the student complaint system. It is recommended that this area be explored by the Dean of Student's Office. Committee research has indicated that a majority of student complaint processes are managed through this office, and
4) The area that is designated to manage the student complaint system will need to work closely with the Office of Strategic Planning and Accountability. This will ensure accountability for the program and assist in providing statistical data for the community to better understand students as stakeholders.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: It would be an objective to have a student complaint process at MCTC that would have value to other institutions, specifically to use as a model or reference. At this time the project is in its developmental stage.

5: Project Challenges

A: The College lacked quantitative data to review regarding student complaints and this created an obstacle for our review. The committee foresees that having a new student complaint process developed will create another process for management that will be time consuming. The prime challenges will be identifying the suitable area to manage the complaint process, in addition to achieving the critical steps that the committee has identified.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The committee is to be commended for moving forward in a systematic way toward the objectives outlined at the beginning of this Action Project. It is clear that some important structural improvements took place during this time, including the recognition that some departments did not realize the importance of retaining data in this area. The classification of the complaints into common categories was a great step forward as well. These actions illustrate the AQIP Categories of Planning Continuous Improvement, and Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs.

Surveying the systems of other colleges and selecting a process to emulate was an important step forward as well. This is a clear illustration of AQIP Category #9, that of Building Collaborative Relationships. The plan developed to create an on-line complaint system is an important intiative, and could help turn student complaints into significant gains in the quality improvement arena.

2: Institution Involvement

A: The involvement of the various departments into the improvement process was a very important initiative. A by-product of this kind of collaboration will be the new lines of communication that are formed when this type of team work takes place. The relational infrastructure this puts in place will be important to the implementation of the complaint system, and can help to move it beyond plan to reality. The level of awareness that this raised about the importance of student complaints can move the organization forward in this way as well. This is a clear illustration of AQIP Category #9, that of Building Collaborative Relationships.

3: Next Steps

A: The steps identified are vital to the implementation of the initiative. A policy which has been in place for eleven years is sure to need review. The involvement of the stakeholders which this impacts in the process should insure their support of the policy if it is revised.

The development of an on-line method for student complaint and feedback would be a great asset indeed. The IT department can help support and implement this initiative, thus preparing them to maintain the system after it has been implemented. The designation of a "home" department for the system may help other departments in the organization know where to turn when there are questions about its operation or issues of policy to be resolved. Furthermore, providing statistical data to the community can help key stakeholders understand the improvements to the system that have been made. These initiatives demonstrate the AQIP Categories of Helping Students Learn, Building Collaborative Relationships, and Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: As mentioned, this is an important objective for the Action Project. However, it may be prudent to implement the new system and work out any problems that arise before exporting it to others. Central New Mexico Community College may be an effective partner in this as well, since their practices provided the model for some of the key ideas involved. This would be a further illustration of Category #9, that of Building Collaborative Relationships.

5: Project Challenges

A: These were formidable challenges, but progress was made through their recognition. Becoming aware of the fact that departments did not retain complaint data was in itself an important finding of the study.

The committee is to be commended on its steady progression toward the objectives set forth, the awareness they created about the problem, the collaboration of different departments, and the strategy developed to create and implement the system. All of these things demonstrate that the organization is making reasonable progress toward completion of the Action Project *and* the development of an institution-wide continuous quality improvement culture.

The full realization of these goals will require those involved to maintain the momentum generated during this time, and set up the time-lines necessary to turn the vision into reality. In the absence of this, the strategy could languish, and the good accomplished by these first steps could be lost.

Project Outcome

1: Reason for completion

A: The Committee was able to identify critical steps required to move forward with MCTC's Student Complaint Process.

- The Committee identified that the College review and update its current Student Complaint and Grievance Policy 4.10 and 4.10.01 the policy was last reviewed and updated on July 1, 1999. http://www.minneapolis.edu/collegepolicies/policy.cfm?policy_id=67 This process will include committee review, policy development, student input, faculty input, and cabinet approval.
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- The Committee identified that the area that is designated to manage the student complaint system will need to work closely with the Office of Strategic Planning and Accountability. This will ensure accountability for the program and assist in providing statistical data for the community to better understand student's as stakeholders.

2: Success Factors

A: Examining and investigating the common patterns of student complaints. This process involved members collecting data and information in regard to student complaints campus wide. Members found a lack of quantitative data available for committee review. Many offices and departments do not collect or maintain student complaint data. Records were available from Academic Affairs,

Judicial Affairs, Legal Affairs, and Public Safety. The committee was able to determine the top five (5) common patterns of student complaints as: Academic Environment, College Procedures, Customer Service, Employee Performance, and Inaccurate Information. Categorizing student complaints. This process involved members categorizing all probable student complaint varieties explored by the committee. The committees then grouped the complaints into College areas and/or departments responsible for responding to the complaints.

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3: Unsuccessful Factors

A: The College lacked quantitative data to review regarding student complaints and this created an obstacle for our review. The committee foresees that having a new student complaint process developed will create another process for management that will be time consuming. The prime challenges will be identifying the suitable area to manage the complaint process, in addition to achieving the critical steps that the committee has identified.