

Start With the “End in Mind”

It was with a great deal of enthusiasm that RRCC launched its first Action Projects. We were fresh from a highly successful “Conversation Day” attended by 267 of the colleges’ 300 full time employees, and we had strong consensus on what needed to be accomplished to improve student success. The key lesson we learned when initiating cross-departmental improvement efforts is that part of the INITIAL planning process MUST be the development of measurable objectives, and identification of data sources by which the teams will be able to regularly check the progress of the implementation.

Create Our Own Quality Improvement Identity

RRCC has been mindful to align our quality improvement efforts with the Colorado Community College System’s Strategic Plan as directed by the Performance Contract between the System and the Colorado Department of Higher Education. As noted in the RRCC Systems Portfolio Feedback Report; “RRCC has an opportunity to define its own, internally-driven measures of effectiveness.” Toward this effort, the college has re-constituted a representative Collaboration Council with the charge to define the strategic directions specific to the college. Initial efforts have focused on identifying pertinent data sources to assist in a current needs analysis. The identification of the strategic directions for the college will be “data-informed” to assist in the process of prioritizing and benchmarking the quality improvement initiatives currently underway and guide future initiative development.

Prioritizing When Resources Are Tight

The paradox faced by most community colleges of a souring economy and soaring enrollment requires scenario planning. With double digit enrollment increases for the last three semesters, we are not in a position to sit tight. Our commitment to our students requires a vital and active process of evaluating our priorities with regard to meeting the educational needs of our students. We are developing a consistent matrix to examine individual programs. The resulting data will be used to evaluate the program’s outcomes and determine plans of action as appropriate with regard to resource allocation and or program restructuring. The college’s Collaborative Council will be instrumental in reviewing the program matrices and making program recommendations.

Communication -- The Make or Break of Quality Improvement Buy-In

Maintaining the momentum through the designing and implementation of quality improvement initiatives requires multiple communication modalities. Keeping the college community informed of the progress and outcomes of our Action Projects and other quality improvement initiatives is challenging. Two years into the implementation of the Action Projects, evaluation teams were formed of staff and faculty with no direct experience in working on the Projects. These teams reached a consistent conclusion with regard to keeping the college community

informed about the Projects. Postings to the intranet and occasional updates at all-staff meetings are not sufficient. The perennial communication conundrum is one of the primary charges of the Collaboration Council. Progress toward this goal will be a significant part of the new Action Project specific to the formation and functioning of the Collaboration Council as the primary body responsible for the strategic directions of the college and creating the communication loop essential to successful implementation.

We Are All In This Together

Our physical plant is primarily one long building with a “bridge” between the east and west ends of the main building. The west end is primarily occupied by faculty and instructional support and the east end houses administration and student support services. The physical design of our main campus has at times exacerbated the silo effect between instruction and student support services. Issues with communication are even more apparent between the main and north campus. Efforts to ensure the engagement of the north campus staff must be a priority. Efforts to create a niche identity for the north campus resulted in the moving of programs from the main campus. Moving the programs was successful in establishing the identity for the north campus, however, staff of these programs no longer frequent the main campus. Communication barriers have arisen as an unintended consequence. Since joining AQIP our initial Action Projects demonstrated clearly the multiple benefits of working within cross-departmental teams to achieve common goals. While committees comprised of individuals from multiple departments is certainly not new to the college, the consistent documentation and reporting of the work of the Action Project Teams taught us how to “close the loop” of PLAN, DO, CHECK, ACT. As a result, each of our initial Action Projects now have a “life” as regular operating functions of the college. Continuing to support the college community in the iterative process of quality improvement requires support with regard to training and consistent opportunities to share the challenges and successes with colleagues.