The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Lake Erie College

Project Details

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1: Project Goal
A: The purpose is to a) streamline the graduation process to make it friendlier and more understandable for students and faculty; b) review the withdrawal process and begin to collect data to be used in decision-making related to retention efforts.

2: Reasons For Project
A: Due to growth over the past several years, our current processes do not meet the needs of the student, faculty, office staff, and the new retention committee efforts.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

4: Key Organizational Process(es)
A: Increase in student satisfaction related to the graduation process - a more streamlined process will catch issues much earlier and efforts to fix issues before they become a "crisis" will be included. It will also increase the efficiency of the Registrar's Office in completing the certification process. Data collection for the purpose of advising, 4 Year Degree Planning, graduation, and retention will be more readily available.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale
A: A full academic year is needed to assess the current processes, create new steps, communicate the new process and implement steps (in multiple offices) for both graduation and the withdrawal processes. A full cycle is especially needed for the graduation assessment since degree certification is complete three times per year.

6: Project Success Monitoring
A: The Registrar's staff will dedicate at least one staff meeting per month to working on the graduation process. Updates will be given on the progress to the Associate VP for Academic Affairs monthly. For the withdrawal process, a quarterly update on progress will be given to the Associate VP for Academic Affairs by the Registrar.

7: Project Outcome Measures
A: Graduation process: Specific benchmarks will be checked as the project progresses. Benchmarks for graduation included timeline when all degree audits are reviewed by office staff, number of late graduation applications received, total hours worked by Registrar's staff in the weeks leading up to degree certification. Withdrawal process: The benchmark will be the ability to create reports from the Jenzabar EX system for the retention committee of beneficial data by specific deadlines or on request.
### Project Update

1: **Project Accomplishments and Status**

A: A great deal was accomplished on both the withdrawal and graduation processing fronts. We have effectively changed the culture of graduation processing for the Registrar's Office and dramatically improved communication and understanding of the student and faculty needs within the withdrawal and graduation process. Although we have some unfinished items that will require completion, the basic processes are set.

2: **Institution Involvement**

A: For the graduation process review, the Registrar's Office staff met four times to address communication, paperwork, timelines, systems configuration, tracking, and reporting. A similar set of issues were addressed in the withdrawal review by a team which consisted of the Bursar, Director of Financial Aid, Dean of Students, Director of IT, Athletics Compliance Officer, Facilities rep, Director of Security, and chaired by the Registrar (for a total of 3 meetings). Additionally, the Registrar led two student focus groups and a faculty focus group to gather input regarding expectations, ease of process, and identification of issues from a perspective other than the Registrar's Office. Additionally, the Registrar benchmarked withdrawal processes from 12 other schools to gather insight and new ideas. The Registrar also provided updates to the AVPAA monthly, and reported progress to the Retention Committee.

3: **Next Steps**

A: The next steps will include completion of configurations, communication of new processes and distribution of new forms more widely (including the plan for more on-line access and processing). Assessment of reporting needs and opportunities due to the changes will also be completed in the coming year. Finally, a plan for examining "re-enrollment" will also be undertaken.

4: **Resulting Effective Practices**

A: There is now written documentation of both processes for the use in the Registrar's Office. During the withdrawal review, definitions of varied types of students were developed (Active, Inactive, and Alumni) as well as the level of access each group will have to campus resources (network, intranet, facilities, services, etc). Additionally, definitions of the types of withdrawals have been determined (administrative, judicial, medical, etc). More efficient and cleaner processes have been developed. Better communication between students, faculty and the Registrar now exists. The processes are far more pro-active and will enable better tracking mechanisms and will provide better reporting opportunities. These accomplishments will allow for better enrollment planning.

5: **Project Challenges**

A: There may be need for assistance with programming for the on-line applications in the student portal. Also, the degree audit, as a major component of the graduation process, also needs updating with more "user friendly" functionality. Our current plan is to wait for Jenzabar's 4th quarter update of the Advising Module to determine if upgrades are sufficient or if additional programming will be necessary. If so, our in-house level of expertise may not be sufficient.

### Update Review

1: **Project Accomplishments and Status**

A: It sounds like progress has been made. It would be helpful, however, if the institution could frame its accomplishments with data supporting its claims about process improvements and cultural change. For example, student or employee perceptions survey data might be a clear way of measuring and demonstrating changes and improvements. Too, if specific process enhancements have been made, perhaps the institution could identify what these looked like before the action project, as well as at the time of this progress report. A final step would be to connect survey data to the changes made so as to reflect actual, identified areas of improvement, the changes made, and the impact on student and faculty satisfaction.
2: **Institution Involvement**

The institution is to be commended for its focused effort aimed at involving multiple and varied stakeholders as a means of practicing shared governance, but also as a matter of culling feedback from a wide variety of internal sources. Additionally, the external review of practices at other institutions seems an invaluable addition to the process. It will be important to apprise the many internal participants of the progress having been made, especially as relates to changes in process, so as to validate their participation in the process and contributions in the form of feedback and new ideas.

3: **Next Steps**

The institution has identified a clear set of follow-up steps for implementation and communication surrounding the identified process changes to come out of the action project process. The College has also identified an area to tackle next with the same intentions, aimed largely at process and culture improvement. It would be useful for the institution to add to its next steps a focus on indentifying a plan for assessing the impact of the changes to be implemented. Specifically, what measures will be gathered, through what means will the data be generated, from whom will the data be collected, at what intervals will the assessment of progress be measured, and what expected results are anticipated are all questions the assessment strategy should address.

4: **Resulting Effective Practices**

The institution provides a detailed, narrative description of the process changes, as well as its evaluation that these changes have resulted in improvements. At this stage it is important for the institution to provide data validating that improvements have in fact been achieved, so that the what are claimed to be advancements in process can be validated with data. This is an important piece in the assessment and planning cycle generally, but especially important given the institution's plans to communicate results to stakeholders, and to apply the same set of action plan processes to addressing another element within the enrollment/registrarial cycle.

5: **Project Challenges**

The institution has identified certain project challenges which appear to pose operational difficulties against a set of deliverables within a larger, strategic initiative. The institution is right to identify these kinds of challenges, especially as they have the potential to limit implementation of the desired changes identified through the action plan process. Given that the action plan identified numerous process improvements it will be important for the institution to clearly communicate to stakeholders which elements of the plan can and have been implemented versus those held up by technology limitations.