Action Project Details

Title: New Student Orientation
Version: 3
Institution: Illinois Central College
Status: Completed
Submitted: 2009-11-24
Category: 1-Helping Students Learn

Timeline

Planned project kickoff date: 2006-09-01
Target completion date: 2009-12-31
Actual completion date: 2009-12-18

Project Detail

Project Goal
Describe this Action Project's goal in 100 words or fewer

This Action Project is focused on improving the delivery of orientation to new Illinois Central College students, maximizing the number of students who participate, and assessing the effect of student participation on student success. Fundamentally, and in line with the College's Core Values and Blueprint For The Future, this Project's goals are to optimize student success, enhance students' goal attainment, maximize new student awareness of critical College services and resources, and increase retention.

Reasons For Project
Describe briefly your institution's reasons for taking on this Action Project now -- why the project and its goals are high among your current priorities

The College has five Core Values--Learning, Integrity, Responsibility, Community, and Excellence--which drive all that we do. A Blueprint For The Future has been developed which features critical success factors related to the Blueprint priorities. The first of these priorities is "We must increase student success." The College held a series of AQIP Conversations involving a wide representation of College personnel. From these discussions, we identified 27 themes. The themes were prioritized at the Cabinet level and from this process came ideas for AQIP action projects, six sigma teams, teams related to our Blueprint initiative, and other action steps. At the heart of both our mission and our Core Values is student success--the prime focus of this Project.

Organizational Areas Affected
List the organizational areas -- institutional departments, programs, divisions, or units -- most affected by or involved in this Action Project

The organizational areas most affected by this project: Academic Affairs and all individual
Key Organizational Process(es)
Name and describe briefly the key organizational process(es) that you expect this Action Project to change or improve

Key organizational processes affected: Student enrollment Student registration Budgeting Facilities planning Counseling and advising

Project Time Frame Rationale
Explain the rationale for the length of time planned for this Action Project (from kickoff to target completion)

Adequate time must be allotted for both the improvement to be designed and implemented and for an initial assessment of success.

Project Success Monitoring
Describe how you plan to monitor how successfully your efforts on this Action Project are progressing

Initially, incremental success will be directly related to increasing participation numbers. Historically, the College has experienced disappointing attendance at Orientation by first-year students. In addition, retention data will begin to indicate student success.

Project Outcome Measures
Describe the overall "outcome" measures or indicators that will tell you whether this Action Project has been a success or failure in achieving its goals

A six sigma team is currently determining the process by which we will assess the project. Methodology will be in place by Fall 2007. Among the outcomes we will want to review and analyze are retention rates, GPA's, satisfaction levels, focus group data, and others for those students participating in orientation.

Annual Update

Project Accomplishments and Status
Describe the past year’s accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project

As the AQIP Action Team worked on improving new student orientation, we learned that many programs across the college have an “orientation” for their new students. Many students were not attending the college’s orientation because they were attending a program-specific orientation (example: nursing or paralegal). The orientation team contacted these programs and asked to review the agendas for their programs’ orientations. The team found many programs were covering content specific to an academic major, but did not cover the types of tools that needed for orienting students to the career center, counseling center, or learning labs. This was problematic because the students invited to attend program-specific orientations typically did not attend a general college orientation and, therefore, would not always receive information regarding student services. This hampered this AQIP Action Team’s three primary goals, which are to improve the content of the general orientation material, to increase the number of students attending the College’s general orientation
sessions, and to assess the impact of the general orientation sessions on measures of student success. This past year, the orientation team altered its approach by working with program-specific orientations in order to assist program directors in providing general information regarding student services. After reviewing our general college orientations, we found that the team had three types of orientation services we could provide to program directors to assist them in their orientations. These three services include: 1. Illinois Central College Technology Session: This session orients students to the use of e-services, Illinois Central College email, and Blackboard. This session can be up to 1 hour in length or can be shortened if necessary. 2. Student Services Video or a Student Services Speaker: Last year, the AQIP orientation team created a 14 minute video which covers general college policies, what to expect in the college classroom and student services. This video could be shown at a program specific orientation by the program director or the program director could request an individual to speak for 15 – 30 minutes regarding student services. 3. Orientation Folders: The orientation team has assembled several handouts pertinent to student services which are given to each student who attends the general college orientation. These handouts contain the office locations, phone numbers, and services offered for all student services at all campus locations. In February, the orientation team sent out a questionnaire asking each program director if he/she would be interested in utilizing any of the three services listed above. Program directors were also asked the date, time and location of their orientation as well as the number of expected attendees. We had 15 program directors respond requesting services from the orientation team. The most commonly requested service was an orientation folder. Many of the programs did not request a speaker but instead showed the video and utilized the orientation folder as a supplement to the video. Many of the health careers program directors did not request a technology session because the majority of their students have been at Illinois Central College for one or two years waiting to be accepted into a health careers program. Theses program directors did not feel their students needed a technology session since many of the students were already familiar with the college’s technology. In addition to the program specific orientations, the orientation team also hosted 3 general college orientation sessions: August 4, 12 and 13. The team will also host another orientation session on September 2 for students who enrolled after August 1 and did not receive an invitation to the August orientations. The current status of this project is to have another team meeting on September 10 to discuss the general college orientations and the process of working with the program-specific orientations. At that time we will discuss plans for the future regarding new student orientation.

Institution Involvement
Describe how the institution involved people in work on this Action Project

The orientation team is comprised of faculty and staff from various departments across the college. This year, the team also involved program directors in the process. By involving program directors, the number of individuals who are aware of the orientation process has increased. The program directors have been utilizing the orientation team’s knowledge and resources in order to provide a better orientation experience for their students.

Next Steps
Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project

One primary task of the AQIP Action Team will be to evaluate and compare the
effectiveness of this year’s orientation approach to that of the past two years. This will involve members of the College’s AQIP Steering Committee and members of a prior Six Sigma team, which documented the methodology originally used to illustrate the relationship between attendance at orientation and measures of student success. Due to the complexity of that initial approach (a matched pairs design), and the departure of the Six Sigma team’s primary investigator (a former faculty member), the Action Team was unable to replicate and report on any measures beyond a headcount of participants. Secondly, the Action Team needs to give its attention to establishing a more robust means of measuring the students’ perceptions of the orientation’s impact on their academic progress. Students’ post-orientation perceptions of the material covered have given us an idea of its immediate impact, or palatability, but the College would benefit more from the students’ perceptions at a later point in the term. A final step will be an analysis of the cost of the orientation folders as well as the materials that are provided in the folders in order to better project the costs associated with a two-format approach (general and program-specific orientations).

**Resulting Effective Practices**

Describe any "effective practice(s)" that resulted from your work on this Action Project

The coordination with the program directors would be an effective practice. By working with the program directors, we are able to reach more students, assist other departments, and customize an orientation that is specific to a certain student population.

**Project Challenges**

What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project

The most immediate challenge will be to establish better methods for documenting actual participation in the various orientation sessions (rather than the students’ stated intention to attend via a reservation card) and assessing the impact of the multiple orientation formats on measures of student success. The team needs to be certain that its approaches are robust and replicable. The College’s new Director of Accreditation and Assessment, who chairs the AQIP Steering Committee, has discussed this dilemma with the Committee members with the intention of turning a more critical eye toward evidence gathering for all AQIP Action Projects. Another challenge might be the cost of the orientation folder materials. The orientation team did not anticipate such a demand for folders and the cost to print and assemble so many folders has been high. Also, it has been a very time consuming task to assemble all of the folders. The team will need to look at an alternative method for next year. Perhaps the materials offered in the folder need to be scaled down or perhaps each department will need to cover the cost of their folder materials. The team has also considered utilizing flash drives that would contain all of the orientation folder handouts on the flash drive. By doing this, we would not need to print any handouts and the student could have the flash drive to use throughout the semester. We have looked into pricing of flash drives and at this time this idea would be too expensive to pursue. The team has also looked into the possibilities of grant money to help offset the cost of the flash drives and have not found any grants that would fit with this project. The other concern would be if a student would actually look through handouts on a flash drive. In a random survey of students, the team found that many students indicated they would not look at the handouts on a flash drive, but they indicated that they would look at handouts in a folder.
Annual Update

Reason for completion
What is the primary reason for closing this project?

The new student orientation project had fulfilled the scope of its original designed and project leaders were allowed for enough time to collect fall 2009 enrollment and retention data.

Success Factors
What aspects of this project would you categorize as successful?

Moving the concept of the orientation from a static, single-shot meeting with enriched content (as was originally designed) to a "multi-modal" approach, wherein orientation elements - or modules - were also incorporated with program-specific orientations. The program-specific orientations were typically better attended by students.

Unsuccessful Factors
What aspects of this project would you categorize as less than successful?

Creating a robust means of relating orientation attendance to student success, and gathering perceptions of students about the orientation process at appropriate intervals for analysis of voicing data.