

# The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

## Columbus State Community College

Project Details		
<b>Title</b>	Bridging Communication Gaps Within Columbus State Community College Decision-Making Process	<b>Status</b> COMPLETED
<b>Category</b>	5-Leading and Communicating	<b>Updated</b> 09-12-2008
<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Planned Project Kickoff</b> 07-01-2007 <b>Actual Completion</b>	<b>Reviewed</b> 09-15-2008 <b>Created</b> 11-24-2009 <b>Version</b> 1

### 1: Project Goal

**A:** We will develop a phased plan to bridge the communication gaps in Columbus State Community College's upward communication processes toward decision-making. The first phase is to conduct a communication audit that will identify and prioritize areas of concern. Phase 2 will develop recommendations from the data collected. This project will be successfully completed when we generate an outline of specific recommendations for a pilot program.

### 2: Reasons For Project

**A:** Upward communication for decision-making was mentioned in conversation day and given high priority in a campus wide survey.

### 3: Organizational Areas Affected

**A:** All organization areas will be better served by more effective upward communication. Since all parts of the college are directly or indirectly serving our students and our community, any improvement in upward communication will positively impact our constituency.

### 4: Key Organizational Process(es)

**A:** Process of upward communication

### 5: Project Time Frame Rationale

**A:** One month to select a vendor. Two months to conduct focus groups and/or analyze data. Two months to develop and conduct survey. Two months to analyze the data. One month to develop an outline for phase 2.

### 6: Project Success Monitoring

**A:** We will monitor the following: meeting the established milestones and response rate of the survey and/or focus groups.

### 7: Project Outcome Measures

**A:** This project will be successfully completed when we generate an outline of specific recommendations for improvement in upward communication.

### 8: Other Information

**A:** We will report regularly the project's progress on the Columbus State Community College AQIP website.

## Project Update

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### 1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The Action Project team created a Request for Proposal (RFP) for potential survey vendors to review the Columbus State Community College Constellation Survey results document and determine the appropriate survey and/or focus group tool to further identify specific communication gaps in upward communication. The vendor selection process resulted in no vendor being selected. Instead of an outside vendor, the Action Project Team members decided to review the Constellation Survey and developed two themes based on the review: The Action Project team recommended to the CSCC AQIP Steering Committee that the college hire an ombudsman that would provide a clearinghouse of information to resolve issues. The Steering Committee suggested that the Action Project Team examine the communication processes of college committees and their practices of soliciting input for decision-making. A second phase of the project is now chartered to identify campus chartered committees and to improve communication processes and to improve upward communication through committees.

### 2: Institution Involvement

A: The formulation of the project involved over 50 people from a variety of department and levels within the college through a series of conversations. The project was defined by an iterative process which included external feedback from other AQIP institutions and AQIP/HLC staff. The Action Project results were shaped by faculty, staff and administrators from six departments and four divisions of the college in gathering data for this project. Additionally, the seven members of the President's cabinet and the 18 members of AQIP Steering Committee provided input.

### 3: Next Steps

A: The team will gather data about the currently chartered committees and develop a system to update and maintain this information. The committee communication process will be valuable to people that would like to provide input to vital work of the college.

### 4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The team leader encouraged feedback from the team members by email, phone or discussion board through the Blackboard community web site. The web site was available to the team to access documents anytime from any location.

### 5: Project Challenges

A: Challenges this team faced were the turnover of two team sponsors and miscommunication between the team and the Steering Committee. The team has since established rules of the road to minimize miscommunication between the team, the sponsor, and the Steering Committee in the future.

### 6: AQIP Involvement

A:

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## Update Review

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### 1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: It is clear that this project and current status aligns well with Category 5: Leading and Communicating. Even though the applicant has listed two themes that are outcomes of the first part of the project, one being an examination of committee practices in soliciting input, it isn't clear how this will ultimately improve the communication process for vertical decision-making. In addition, the process for aligning college committee decision-making to the upper administration's process for decision-making is not apparent. Without a clear method for aligning the process vertically, there may not be integrity built into this new process. Also, it isn't clear how the Applicant will ensure appropriate decision making. In addition, the project goals initially stated that the first step would be to "conduct a

communication audit that will identify and prioritize areas of concern." Even though there are "two themes" identified, it is not clear where the specific "communication gaps" are. Without a clear sense of where the gaps in communication are, it may be difficult to 1) provide solutions for the specific gaps, and 2) be transparent to the college population about what the gaps are and what is going to be done to fix them.

## 2: Institution Involvement

A: It is clear that a significant number of people were involved in this project, however, it is not clear if the representation was sufficient or a valid sampling of the college campus. For example, was there sufficient staff membership and/or input in the project? If sufficient or valid representation (a mix of administration, faculty, and staff) was not utilized, campus-wide buy-in may not be achieved and the final process may not produce the hoped for or expected outcomes.

## 3: Next Steps

A: Even though this addition to the process may be valuable, it is not clear how it fits into an overall vertical alignment of the communication process on the campus. It is also not clear if there is a feedback process for the people who provide input to the "vital work of the college." Without a systematic feedback process, the people who provide input may become discouraged, hearing nothing from their suggestions. In addition, it is not clear how the college will communicate the results of decisions that have been made based on input from lower levels. Without a systematic process for sharing results and learnings, those that provide input into the work of the college may become discouraged with the process and discontinue participating.

## 4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: Transparent, honest communication is a critical process on college campuses. In addition, using technology to share learnings and documents is a valid, time-saving, and transparent method for doing so. It is not clear if this method of sharing documents was successful or if it was used at all by members of the team. In addition, it is not clear if the team was encouraged to provide negative feedback or criticism through email, phone, or discussion board. Without the encouragement and honest reception of negative as well as positive feedback, the campus leadership may not be aware of issues brewing under the surface and consequently, the project may not ultimately succeed.

## 5: Project Challenges

A: Turnover in work teams is always a struggle and one that should be anticipated to minimize the negative effects. Even though the applicant states that "rules of the road" have been established, it is not clear what the "rules" are or if they have been effective. Without clear operating procedures, teams many times fail during deliberation. In addition it is not clear if the college teams are being facilitated or simply run. Without a trained facilitator to manage meetings of work teams, output is many times hampered and outcomes are minimal.

## 6: AQIP Involvement

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