

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Columbus State Community College

Project Details		
Title	Switch to Semesters (S2S) Phase Three	Status COMPLETED
Category	1-Helping Students Learn	Updated 09-07-2012
Timeline		Reviewed 09-11-2012
	Planned Project Kickoff 11-01-2011	Created 12-14-2010
	Actual Completion 08-27-2012	Version 2

1: Project Goal

A: This action project represents the third and final phase of Columbus State's Switch to Semesters (S2S). The semester conversion process has been underway since Autumn 2009 and is a President/Cabinet level initiative with the goal of converting all of Columbus State's curriculum and processes from a quarter to a semester calendar. This effort is scheduled to complete in Autumn 2012. Phase 3 will focus on completing conversion of curriculum and information technology systems, and on preparing students, faculty and staff for the new calendar.

2: Reasons For Project

A: This project was developed based on guidance from the University System of Ohio (USO) Strategic Plan. A primary goal of the USO is to improve the level of educational attainment across the state. A key facet of meeting this goal is to improve transferability options, increase multi-campus partnerships, and increase efficiencies. In order to support these goals, the USO has recommended the use of a common calendar and asked all colleges in Ohio to convert to a semester calendar by Autumn 2012.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: The scope of the S2S project includes all departments on campus. During this third phase we will be focused on completion of curricular conversion, including distance learning; final updates to information technology systems; student advising; and communication to students, faculty, and staff. Divisions heavily involved will include:

Arts and Sciences

Career and Technical Programs

Distance and Blended Learning

Information Technology

Student Affairs

Institutional Advancement

Business and Administrative Services

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: Project management: We have had a governance structure and project management process in place for this project since its start in Autumn 2009. We are using this project as a model for managing other large projects and have already begun employing the strategies we used on this project to support other initiatives.

Registration: The S2S project has undertaken a review of registration processes and deadlines. We are working to encourage students to register earlier so that they can increase their chances of appropriate preparation for the semester leading to greater academic success.

Distance Learning: One of the focuses of this year's work will be the conversion of distance learning courses. Faculty committees are currently looking at ways to improve delivery of and student success in distance learning courses.

Catalog development: We are working to streamline catalog production by improving course information entry into our Datatel Colleague ERP system and using it to source much of the catalog. This will improve the accuracy of the catalog while reducing the time needed

to prepare it for publication.

Information Technology System testing: This is ongoing from last year's S2S Action Project. We will be completing development of information technology system modifications this year and incorporating our testing processes into regular system maintenance and enhancements.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: Extensive work planning has informed the timeline for this project. This phase builds on the work of the previous two years to wrap up the conversion and kick off our initial semester in Autumn 2012. This time frame was based on research into the project plans of similar schools that have undergone semester conversion and an analysis of the tasks needed across the college to accomplish a successful conversion

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: A variety of methods are used to monitor progress on S2S and to ensure involvement of key groups. Our progress monitoring is based on the project milestone list which we developed early in the project and have continued to update over the past three years. We also maintain a project risk register to identify and remediate any issues which could cause a delay. Multiple groups are involved in monitoring overall project progress:

Steering Committee meetings focus on proactive milestone reviews, Key Business Decision (KBD) approvals, reviews of time sensitive key issues and risks, and cross-subcommittee communication.

Subcommittee meetings focus on subcommittee specific milestone progress, KBD analysis, task groups as needed, and support the Core Implementation Team in completing activities and making decisions.

Core Team meetings focus on the detailed activities of the project, implementation of system updates, risk resolution, and cross-project communication.

Progress Reports are generated by the project manager on a regular basis and include information from team members. They are shared with key campus groups such as Cabinet, deans and other administrators, Shared Governance committees, departments, and S2S team members.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: Planning for the S2S effort began at CSCC in September 2009. A master plan of 'milestones' was subsequently developed through to the first semester in August 2012. Milestones, or measures, are major accomplishments over the course of the project schedule which impact most subcommittees' work efforts and are well understood by all subcommittee members. They are significant points in time, tangible achievements, key meetings, key decisions made, key communications, etc. Milestones serve as the foundation for project level progress reporting and help ensure focus on most important events. Milestones will also be included on individual Subcommittee detailed work plans together with all the activities and tasks. This is "milestone driven work planning".

- **Project Documentation and Sharing.** Network folders have been established based on the organization and work plan of the project for ease of finding project documentation.
- **Risk/Issue Management.** A risk register will detail risk, mitigating actions and ownership issues. A log file will compile issue descriptions, resolutions and issue resolution ownership.
- **Questions Log and Process.** This is a mechanism for capturing all S2S related questions from the many stakeholder groups and funneling to the right subcommittee for answer ownership.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: This action project is completing its third and final phase. In this phase faculty and staff completed curricular conversion, continued student advising, and made information technology systems updates.

The curriculum conversion process included the updating of all courses offered by the college. Every course underwent a peer

review process for quality and rigor. Faculty curriculum committees reviewed 1,500 courses in total. The college also improved participation in statewide transfer programs, offering more than twenty-five new Transfer Assurance Guide or Ohio Transfer Module courses.

Staff members also completed system updates this year. Information technology staff programmed needed changes and moved them into our systems on a schedule based on user needs. This culminated in a mass update to all student academic records in our system so that processes could run in both quarter and semester worlds. After extensive planning and testing we updated over 8 million student academic records without incident and were able to bring systems back up ahead of schedule.

Faculty and staff advisors offered extensive support for students in transition from quarters to semesters. The college's degree audit system has been modified so that students can view their programs and progress under either a quarter or a semester system. Members of the project team provided training sessions to faculty and staff advisers to support their work with the degree audit system, and we developed a video to help students learn to use degree audit. Many of the college's more structured programs (e.g. Nursing, Allied Health) assigned specific faculty members to work with transition students, so that the students would have a familiar person on whom to rely for support. We also did two calling campaigns to provide students with basic information about the semester conversion and to connect them with support resources.

2: Institution Involvement

A: The Steering Committee has continued to provide guidance and oversight for the project and subcommittees have focused on the various impacted areas. The committees have a broad membership of faculty, staff and administrators who participate in decision making. In addition, we utilized standing committees such as those of Shared Governance as well as faculty department and division curriculum committees. Finally, the project has been managed day to day by members of a Core Implementation Team who met regularly with affected areas and worked with staff members in those areas to update processes, documents, and information technology systems as well as to support updates in the curriculum.

3: Next Steps

A: This project is now closing out. We have begun to work on closeout documentation and will be having lessons learned meetings with the involved committees.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The college has continued to strengthen use of project management methodologies college-wide, as well as to begin more focused and organized project planning and management of resources. During the past year we provided project management training across campus and shared examples of project management techniques used during the switch to semesters. Other large projects are now following the same project management methodologies.

We have also improved testing scripts and methodologies. We developed approximately 900 unique test scripts for critical information technology systems and are now using these scripts for regular Colleague patch testing as well as for other Information Technology projects. All Colleague functional experts received training on effective testing practices during this project, which has greatly improved testing knowledge and skill across campus.

We have also developed an instructional cost modeling process which we used to ensure cost neutrality during curriculum conversion. The college is continuing to use and refine this process during for ongoing financial planning purposes.

5: Project Challenges

A: Our remaining challenge is to acclimate to teaching and learning under semesters. Our faculty will be teaching a largely new curriculum this year, and that will add to their workload. Given the size and scope of the project, we know there may be issues that even our best planning didn't anticipate, and that we will need to respond to them as they arise over the next year.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The description provided here makes clear what a massive project this is/was! The scope includes course review, the development of new transfer agreements/courses, the updates to IT and student records, advising, degree audit and more. Such a complex process required a great deal of collaboration, foresight and flexibility. To initiate and sustain the focused effort necessary for this is an amazing example of broad commitment. I am particularly impressed by the mention of the calling campaigns to students. I certainly hope (and expect) that this extra effort with communication is yielding results, not only with lowering student anxiety about the change but also with strengthening relationships with them. In addition to those intangibles, the listing of very specific, concrete results makes it clear that Columbus State CC has made reasonable progress on this very complex project.

2: Institution Involvement

A: You have clearly involved a number of key on-campus stakeholders in this phase of the project: faculty, staff and administrators. Integrating existing structure with project-specific groups seems to be a very effective way of approaching this. Incorporating relevant work, as much as possible, within previously existing committees and work groups, likely reduced duplication and adding extra duties. Having a Core Implementation Team helps keep focus with all of the collaboration necessary for a project of this scale and likely made the sharing of information more functional as well.

3: Next Steps

A: I recognize that some of the following points may be touched on in the "Lessons Learned" debriefings that are planned but I do feel that there are some specific issues that should be addressed during this vital first semester of implementation.

As the project is closing out, it is very important to give careful attention to assessment as you continue the Plan-Do-Check cycle. In reviewing the original project plan, I cannot find any genuine "outcome" measures but do find reference to "milestones." The narrative identifies these as "significant points in time, tangible achievements, key meetings, key decisions made, key communications, etc.," and further states, "Milestones serve as the foundation for project level progress reporting and help ensure focus on most important events."

As the reference is specific to "progress reporting," these were not intended as outcome measures. Certainly, in a project of such magnitude and importance, these progress measures are useful and even critical to assuring that the institution is staying on track and moving closer to its conversion to a semester system. As you begin the actual functioning, I think it is important to identify specific ways of measuring the effectiveness of the change.

You included several items in the Project Accomplishment section that could be identified as outcomes measures: changed courses, updated student records, transfer agreements, etc. Listing these and sharing them could be a great focus for a celebration of the completed transition process. Are there other outcome measures that might be worthy of investigating toward the end of your first implementation semester? In particular, assessment of the processes used in accomplishing the change could help refine those processes to make them even more effective in future projects.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The first paragraph is a vivid contrast to the very specific and concrete listings of the first section of the update. Clearly, there is a lot of "project management" going on but there is nothing specific in the way of identifying any of the effective strategies or methodologies. Listing two or three specific, concrete improvements would be much more effective.

As a non-IT person, I would appreciate an indulgent sentence or two to give me at least some vague idea as to what "testing scripts" and "Colleague patch testing" are or at least what they deal with and why/how they are useful/important. I'm guessing that these are processes used to determine what will happen when programming changes are made and whether or not changes are having their intended results without having undesirable, non-intended results.

I'm self-confused on this one: is the developed accounting process designed to prove the change didn't/won't cost the college or the students any more than operating under the quarter system? Or, is a process developed to assure that completing a degree under the semester system won't raise tuition costs over completing one under the quarter system? A bit of elaboration could clear up this issue.

The bottom line for this section is that you invested a tremendous amount of successful effort in making a dramatic change and obviously have uncovered/improved some effective strategies; don't hide the wonderful work you've done under vague generalities.

Using a few, clear, factual statements is much more effective. For example, "The Alumni Foundation and the Million Dollar Drive for facility improvement projects are now using the milestones driven work planning and risk/issue management processes developed during this project."

5: Project Challenges

A: Can you use some of the processes developed/used to help with this? It seems that documentation/sharing, risk/issue management and questions logs could still be useful. It is also important, as stated before, to identify the basis on which you will assess how well the change is working. One possible outcomes measure that should be of great interest to your stakeholders: comparing annual instruction costs on the semester system vs. the quarter system. This could be a great opportunity to demonstrate integrity through transparency.

I appreciate the honesty of recognizing that there will be issues "even our best planning didn't anticipate." Documenting those and documenting how you respond to them will provide information that can be applied not only to addressing these issues but could very well help in future improvement initiatives as well.

I notice on your website an article describing a student sculpture that seemed to be part of a celebration of making the change to the semester system. That strikes me as an outstanding way to expand involvement and focus attention on this great "milestone" in the history of Columbus State Community College.

Project Outcome

1: Reason for completion

A: The project was completed on time and we began our first semester on August 29, 2012.

2: Success Factors

A: Curriculum updates – faculty updated all courses and programs and engaged in rigorous peer-review. This was not simply a mechanical conversion. Faculty examined and revised all curricula with an eye to improvement of student outcomes, strengthening relationships with our four-year partners, and maintaining currency and relevancy of academic programs.

Technology systems conversion – this was initially a source of concern, since at first it wasn't clear whether our student information system would adequately support curriculum and advising needs. Through careful business analysis, development of system modifications and extensive testing, we were able to develop the functionality we needed and manage a smooth conversion.

Advising – began on schedule approximately a year ahead of the conversion. Faculty had developed semester plans of study and basic semester course descriptions by that point which facilitated advising. System updates allowed students' quarter credits to function seamlessly in semester programs and enabled students to plan program completion with a combination of quarter and semester credit.

3: Unsuccessful Factors

A: The project accomplished its goals on time and under budget. Semester conversion was a massive undertaking which impacted everyone at the college, and overall the project was very successful. The challenges we did experience were related to our timelines, which were tight and required heavy workloads on faculty and staff. The project had a fixed end date so the college had to work to the Autumn 2012 deadline. Since our timeline was aggressive there were times when we needed to adjust planning or resource allocation. The timing of the project also didn't always leave us much time for discussion and sometimes small groups had to make decisions. Ideally we would have liked more time to discuss and consider options in certain areas.