

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Columbus State Community College

Project Details		
Title	Implement Career Assistance Process to Help Undecided Students Declare Major (Phase II)	Status REVIEWED
Category	1-Helping Students Learn	Updated 09-30-2011
Timeline		Reviewed 10-19-2011
	Planned Project Kickoff 12-14-2010	Created 12-15-2010
	Target Completion 06-30-2011	Version 1

1: Project Goal

A: This project is in its second phase as part of Columbus State's Student Success initiatives. The overall focus of this project is to increase the number and percentage of new and continuing students who declare a major. During Phase II, the focus will be to use what was learned from last year's project in the following initiatives: expanding the number and types of workshops or events to assist students in declaring a major, further expanding and refining the web portal with web resources to assist students with declaring a major, improving cohort tracking of new and undeclared students, and seeking qualitative data on the effectiveness of the intervention strategy from undeclared students who decided on a major.

2: Reasons For Project

A: The number of new and undecided students for a given autumn quarter remains high. Approximately 397 new, and 1,305 total undecided students were enrolled during Autumn 2010. While the current intervention has shown promising results, the college needs to continue to pay attention to this group of "at risk" students, as their retention rates continue to be lower than that of the overall student population.

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: Areas involved in this project include Counseling Services, Admissions Office, Advising Services and academic departments

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

A: The process by which first quarter students choose then declare a major.

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: During Phase II, the twelve month time frame will allow the project team to complete the projects assigned, as well as obtain another full year's worth of quantitative data on the effectiveness of the intervention strategy and resources, using what was learned from last year. A year's worth of gathering qualitative data from undecided students who declared a major, will also be helpful in further refining the process through which students choose and declare a major.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: The following areas will be monitored for new undecided students, as well as the general population, throughout Phase II of the project: course completion, cumulative grade point average, number who declare a major, attendance and evaluation of workshops and events, and results of qualitative evaluations of intervention strategies.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: In elaborating on question six, quarter to quarter retention of Autumn 2010 new students will be monitored through Autumn 2011, course completion rates for the Autumn 2010 new student cohort will be monitored, along with cumulative grade point, the number who declare a major, attendance and workshops, events, and the use of resources to assist students in declaring a major.

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: Plotting an intrusive (restriction capability) counseling intervention for undecided students was the primary deliverable for 2010-2011. The pilot was initiated ahead of schedule during spring quarter 2010 and continues quarterly. Evaluation of the intervention strategy gave insights into the implementation of Phase III of the project, which involves identifying different types continuing misaligned students.

During 2010-2011 the project focused on developing on-line web based tools to assist undecided students. The web based tools includes; a web page with local, state, and national links to help undeclared students with major and career exploration. A Career Resource Library including books on various majors and career exploration is available for student use.

2: Institution Involvement

A: In addition to the team members developing the intervention strategies and resources, staff from Information Technology and Knowledge Resources and Planning assisted in writing queries and gathering data for the project. Counseling Services staff was involved in meeting with students and lifting restrictions. The Telephone Information Center staff was involved in updating student's major records. Team members have also worked with chairpersons in the Career/Technical and Arts and Sciences Divisions on the development of Career Coach.

3: Next Steps

A: The intrusive intervention will expand during autumn 2011 to include continuing misaligned students. The Career Assistance Project Team explored different types of continuing undecided and/or misaligned students and selected pre-radiography students as a pilot. The criteria used for the intervention included the following: active (taken classes and earned a grade within the last three years) pre-radiography students who also received financial aid. The pre-radiography group was selected because of its competitive admission criteria and the large number of students waiting to be admitted into the program when compared to the relative low amount of students accepted into the program annually (130-140 applicants vs. 21-24 accepted).

An on-line web-based tool (Career Coach) is in the implementation process and is expected to roll out during autumn quarter 2011. The tool is designed to assist students in linking CSCC majors to job titles and job postings in the surrounding CSCC region

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The project gave insights into the effectiveness of taking a proactive approach with undecided students via the intrusive counseling intervention and in developing web based tools. As such, the processes have been institutionalized. Career counseling services have expanded to include the creation of a comprehensive Career Services department

5: Project Challenges

A: Despite increasing the number of "choosing a major" workshops, attendance did not increase. Refinement of this delivery method is necessary. Another challenge was developing the career/educational pathway materials. With switch-to-semester in progress, establishing accurate program information from departments has been slow. Once programs have been finalized for switch-to-semester and Career Coach is implemented, career pathway materials will then be developed.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The College has embarked on an ambitious and important project which is to increase the number and percentage of new and continuing students who declare a major. The team has identified students who do not have a major as being "at risk" because their retention rate is lower than the overall student population's retention rate. As of Spring 2010, an intrusive counseling intervention program was introduced, which indicated that in this large group of students there are different types of continuing misaligned students. This shows an understanding that one strategy may not work for all students and that the team may need to explore the problem more deeply to understand various students' needs (AQIP Category 3).

The College has made good progress toward its goal. Even though much of the current work is focusing on fact-based information gathering and developing online and hard copy resources for students, the team should be learning from the data how to develop an effective plan (AQIP Category 8 Planning "Continuous Improvement"). How have the insights gained so far helped the College to refine its plan? The question that will ultimately need to be addressed is whether any of the actions taken have made a significant impact on student retention rates, leading to increased student learning. Is there a target goal for retention of these students or is any positive change in the number and/or percentage acceptable? Is retention for an additional semester the goal or is it degree completion? It will be important to define the goal clearly to be able to measure the effectiveness of the strategy (AQIP Category 7 Measuring Effectiveness).

2: Institution Involvement

A: Coordinating the changes in advising, data collection, and records has required the collaboration of various College departments. This broadness of involvement should help to foster a College-wide commitment to the project (AQIP Category 9).

The update also indicates that staff and administration on various levels have been involved with the project. The involvement of front-line people helps the project team to have a good understanding of the original problem and a good grasp of workable solutions (AQIP Category 5). There should also be some way to include students in the process so that team members can verify their assumptions about students' needs and desires (AQIP Category 3). Although the update did not indicate senior leadership support for these changes, any major change to processes needs validation at the senior leadership-level so that these changes are included as part of the College's overall goals (AQIP Category 5 Leading and Communicating).

3: Next Steps

A: Working with a pilot group that is easily identifiable and has clear, although possibly unrealistic goals (unrealistic in that only 17% of applicants get into the radiography program), makes the pilot manageable. The project team has developed and implemented procedures to work with these students, such as informing them of resources and providing general assistance (AQIP Category 3 Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs). Has the team established specific goals, both short-term and long-term, for this pilot? The pilot's effectiveness has to be measurable; therefore, it is important to set-up measurable goals (AQIP Category 7). Is the goal to get every student registered into appropriate classes for the next semester? Or, is it for every student to have a major declared, but maybe not pre-radiography? Is the goal for every student to have explored the various career research tools available, or, for every student to have met with an advisor? How long will these students be tracked and what will be tracked (course completion, GPA, retention from semester-to-semester, degree completion, successful job placement)? Will there be any control over variables so that the effectiveness of a particular strategy can be assessed?

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The establishment of the Comprehensive Career Services department indicates the College's awareness of the importance of clearly informing students about career readiness. That Career Services is proactively involved with these undecided students to make them more aware of the importance of good career/major decisions while in college, is significant. This would be beneficial for other colleges to hear because it ties so well to the completion agenda.

5: Project Challenges

A: The team members should congratulate themselves for getting so much accomplished on this project while the College was in this switch-to-semester mode. This definitely makes data collection and analysis more difficult. The fact that certain forums or workshops had low attendance, although problematic, could be attributed to the information getting lost in the noise of the switch-to-semester change. What plans has the team made to verify a cause-effect relationship between action taken and changes in student behavior when several significant changes are happening at the same time (AQIP Category 7)? How can the team use this change in the way

the College is operating to communicate to students the need to understand the idea of a career pathway (AQIP Category 5)?
Every challenge can be viewed as an opportunity to create positive change. Although the switch-to-semester may create a challenge as the team validates its progress, it also creates an opportunity to create a new message to students.