

# Innovation *insights*

OFFICE OF PLANNING AND  
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<http://www.psu.edu/president/pia/innovation/>

## The Link Between Being Student-Centered and Continuous Quality Improvement

How do continuous quality improvement principles and practices contribute to a student-centered university? The four components of quality improvement - focusing on service to stakeholders, studying processes, making decisions based on data, and collaborating through teamwork – can be used to create, enhance, and reinforce a student-centered environment. This Innovation Insights discusses these components and provides examples of how each is implemented at Penn State.

### Serving Stakeholders

First and foremost, continuous improvement places addressing and exceeding the needs and expectations of stakeholders at the heart of its efforts. Penn State has many stakeholders, including but not limited to students, parents, faculty, staff, alumni, and residents of the local community and of the Commonwealth. While the University works to address the interrelated expectations of all stakeholders, often learning and student life are the key drivers behind improvement initiatives.

Colleges and departments conduct program reviews to ensure development of relevant and vibrant undergraduate majors. Career services enhances the benefits provided to students, through strengthening relationships with prospective employers, establishing an online employer database, and increasing efficiency of services. Technology makes it possible for students to develop an online e-Portfolio to represent their university accomplishments.

### Studying Processes

Continuous quality improvement (CQI) focuses on streamlining processes, saving time and resources, while still providing a quality product or service. Penn State's university-wide CQI initiative began in the fall of 1991, driven by a belief among top-level administrators that there were too many layers of bureaucracy in the University, and that it took too long to get things done. Students were waiting in line in places such as college advising centers, the Bursar's Office, the pharmacy, the library, and computer labs. Initiatives throughout the University eliminated redundancies, reduced steps, and used technology to improve processes in many ways that made life better for students.

*eLion*, a Web-based interactive system, was initially developed in 1994 and is continuously enhanced and expanded. *eLion* delivers secure Web-based services to students, academic advisers, faculty and prospective

“...being a student-centered university also means being an employee-centered university, an alumni-centered university, a donor-centered university, and a parent-centered university. Why? Because being eager to come to work each day, going the extra mile for a student, enjoying teaching, wanting to be financially generous to one's alma mater, and being proud of your child's college choice are all related to the climate fostered by a student-centered university.”

President Graham Spanier, 2002 State of the University Address

students, saving them time and giving them 24/7 access to information. Now, each day, *eLion* processes thousands of transactions, such as transcript and degree audits, adviser communications, changes of major, and student aid and tuition payments.

The pharmacy at University Health Services fills hundreds of prescriptions a day, many of these for students. In the past, turnaround time was too long. The pharmacy staff implemented an automated, robotic system to do the manual work of placing medication in bottles and preparing labels. Staff verifies the contents afterward. This change reduced turnaround time, increased the accuracy of prescriptions, and improved customer satisfaction.

### **Making Decisions Based On Data**

A key component of CQI is that decisions and improvements are based on data, not opinion.

Penn State Pulse, administered by Student Affairs Research and Assessment, uses telephone and online surveys to obtain feedback from students. Topics have included academic integrity, civility, diversity, hazing, first year experience, post graduation plans, relationship violence, religious and spiritual services, safety, and student drinking, as well as an extensive student satisfaction survey.

Penn State also uses surveys to obtain feedback from faculty and staff on organizational climate and satisfaction. Initial responses to the faculty and staff survey led to the development of Penn State's series of Excellence in Leadership and Management certificate programs, with individual programs tailored to the needs of administrative assistants, first line supervisors, managers, and department heads.

### **Collaborating Through Teamwork**

In CQI, a team brings varied experiences and diverse perspectives to the table. Teams have shared responsibility for a common goal, and make decisions collaboratively. This leads to a quality decision and increased acceptance of the changes.

In designated courses, quality teams of students create a partnership between students and faculty. The students take the responsibility for developing survey questions, collecting and summarizing the data, and sharing the results with the faculty member. This allows students to see improved teaching and learning while the course is underway rather than waiting until the end of the semester.

To better serve its stakeholders, the Office of Student Aid is organized for continuous teamwork. The staff is grouped into six standing teams and many informal teams, which improve services for students, ensure compliance with federal and state regulations, and improve interoffice communication.

To acknowledge the work of teams, and more effectively share their accomplishments, Penn State recognizes them annually and maintains a database of their projects. By 2008, almost 800 teams had worked on improvement and innovation projects across Penn State's many campuses.

At Penn State there has been a steady flow of improvement and innovation initiatives in the areas of academic programs, cocurricular activities, and student and administrative services. These efforts increase the value of the education that students receive and help make Penn State a student-centered university.

For more information about Penn State's improvement and innovation initiatives visit Spotlight on Quality Improvement at <http://qualityspotlight.psu.edu/> and the Team Database at <http://www.psu.edu/president/pia/database/>.

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