



STUDENT TEAMS WORK TO IMPROVE LEARNING

By the end of this semester, approximately 125 students in 12 courses will have improved the education of almost 3,000 students in a wide variety of courses, ranging from business to political science, from communications to statistics. Since the 1998-99 academic year, with the assistance of the Schreyer Institute for Innovation in Learning, undergraduate students have formed Innovation and Quality (IQ) Teams. Team leader Matthew Levendusky, a senior majoring in political science, states:

“You may have a hard time drawing a flow chart for learning, but that doesn’t mean quality concepts don’t apply in the classroom. Students often lament that they have little input into the design of their courses. They complete standardized evaluations at the end of each semester, but they have no mechanism to recommend changes during the semester. To give students more of a voice, in fall 1998 the Schreyer Institute for Innovation in Learning and a group of undergraduate students formed several Innovation and Quality (IQ) teams. Now in their third year, IQ teams remain a completely student-run, student-driven initiative with mentoring from a faculty member and the Schreyer Institute staff.”

“An IQ team is a group of 4-6 students who meet once per week with a team leader to assess the course. They devise survey questionnaires to gather data from their peers. Working with the course instructor, they use this data to monitor the classroom environment and recommend changes to improve student learning.”

“The IQ team gives the professor feedback throughout the semester, generally in four or five surveys. Of equal importance, the IQ program heightens students’ awareness of their own role in the classroom. While thinking about how to improve the class, they start to think about how they interact with the material as students. For the students working on the teams, this is an especially powerful process. They begin by simply focusing on the mechanical aspects of the course and evolve to examine the class activities, such as case studies and group projects, to make them more conducive to learning.”

Please contact the Schreyer Institute at inov8@psu.edu for more information.

MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF PENN STATE’S IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE

Penn State’s quality improvement initiative is in its ninth year; each year we ask the question, “What difference does CQI make?” It takes a commitment of time, resources and money to support an improvement initiative. The Center for Quality and Planning and Management Engineering annually contact Penn State teams to assess the outcome of this commitment. Teams are asked to measure their results in categories of “financial,” “time,” and “client satisfaction.” Recently, 82 active teams were contacted; most had at least anecdotal evidence of success in more than one of the results categories. Following are highlights of responses to the question, “What difference has the work of your team made to the university?”

The Team to Integrate Registration, Student Aid and Bursar Processes at the Start of Each New Semester has implemented a policy whereby classes are no longer canceled for the approximately 3,000 students who do not complete their registrations—i.e., have not paid their semester bill—by the end of the second week of classes. By not canceling their classes, the student aid approved for these students also remains in place. Complaints have gone from dozens per semester to no complaints since this policy was implemented. By the end of the semester, only 200-250 students are ultimately dropped due to non-payment of their semester bill.

The Web-Based Benefits Enrollment Team provides an electronic means whereby faculty and staff can enroll in employee benefits or change their employee benefits online, rather than through paper copy. Since May, 158 people have enrolled online and the feedback from users has been positive. This number should increase when data is collected again in November.

The Computer & Information Systems Process Improvement Through Technology Team works with various university offices to simplify and streamline financial business procedures using information technology. Recently, the team focused on the paper intensive process for paying vendor invoices in the Office of Telecommunications. Through electronic invoicing and the use of Access software to process financial reports, the team yielded a savings of over \$4,860 per year, due to reduced paper flow and reduced billing reporting time. Specifically, the time to process financial reports has been reduced from 7.8 hours per month to 1 hour, and processing two AT&T billing reports requires 84 percent and 67 percent less time, respectively.

The Undergraduate Admissions Information to Guidance Community Team achieves an annual savings of \$4,350 in reduced supplies and postage costs by improving its communication with high school guidance counselors regarding the status of students’ admission to Penn State. Originally, the process required Admissions to send a letter for each individual student, involving over 40,000 letters annually. The improved process provides counselors with a monthly summary sheet and the number of mailings has been reduced to 25,000. The monthly summary reports are well received by the counselors because they provide more detailed information than the letters.

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This team also saves \$4,610 annually by no longer handling high school transcripts that confirm students' graduation. Initially, the procedure involved processing thousands of transcripts received from approximately 4,100 high schools after applicants graduated. The team found they do not need the actual transcript, just a simple confirmation from the high school that a student graduated. The amount of paperwork has decreased from 20,000 transcripts to 4,100 lists of graduated students.

GUIDING UNIT-LEVEL PLANNING

The Center for Quality and Planning supports Penn State's efforts to plan, assess, and improve programs and services. We serve as facilitators for strategic planning retreats to help units identify priorities and determine action plans. We help units use quantitative and qualitative data to assess and improve organizational performance. If you would like more information about unit-level planning, call the Center (814-863-8721) for a copy of its guide and to discuss your planning needs. An updated Planner's Almanac can be found at <http://www.psu.edu/president/cqi/almanac>. This Web site has been created by the Center for Quality and Planning to assist University strategic planners. It provides convenient access to some of the most requested information about Penn State and higher education in Pennsylvania and the nation.

ARE YOU STARTING A NEW PROCESS IMPROVEMENT INITIATIVE?

Be sure to call the Center for Quality and Planning (814-863-8721) for help with any phase of your team activity, from start-up, to data gathering, to data analysis, to teambuilding. The Center staff also continues to provide assistance with focus groups, customer surveys, and the use of quality tools such as flow charts, process mapping, cause and effect (fishbone) diagrams, Pareto charts, etc. For more information and easy access to a form for registering your team, please visit the Center's Web site at <http://www.psu.edu/president/cqi>.

CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA QUALITY AWARD

Contact the Center for Quality and Planning for a copy of the self-assessment form required for applicants seeking to receive the Central Pennsylvania Quality Award. The award is available to any organization within Centre County that meets specific criteria based on a simplified adaptation of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award.