



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

In his State of the University address on September 13, 2002, President Graham Spanier speaks about “the compelling need for Penn State to become a more student-centered university.” Dr. Spanier asserts:

*“Although a university’s national reputation is substantially based on the research productivity and stature of its faculty, we must never forget that our University exists first and foremost to provide an advanced education to our students. I truly believe students must be our top priority, and this is why Penn State must be a model of a student-centered university. As a learning community, we must put our students and their development at the heart of all we do.”*

### Quality Principles and Practices

How do continuous quality improvement principles and practices contribute to a student-centered university? We will answer this question by describing how four components of quality improvement—focusing on stakeholders, involving employees, eliminating bureaucracy, and collaborating on teams—help create and reinforce a student-centered environment.

**Focusing on Stakeholders.** First and foremost, continuous improvement places stakeholder needs at the heart of all its efforts. CQI means continually serving stakeholders better and more economically, using quality principles and tools that are grounded in teamwork. At a student-centered university, students are one of the primary stakeholders and become the beneficiaries of quality improvement practices. President Spanier reminds us, “Always give people more than they expect.”

In other words, at its core, CQI is all about addressing and exceeding the needs and expectations of stakeholders.

Gary Schultz, senior vice president for finance and business, summed up his commitment to a student-centered university in a recent interview about quality improvement:

*“CQI principles are focused on customer service. They are also focused on the fact that we are never good enough today to be successful tomorrow. We must constantly improve, constantly adapt, constantly employ new processes and new tools. With customer service as the centerpiece, a lot of organizations realize that to best serve the customer requires a lot of teamwork and a lot of collaboration. I think we have had tremendous cultural change at Penn State, where people are now seeing the customer in the center of their world, rather than the kind of organizational silos we might have seen in the past.”*

**Involving Faculty and Staff.** Quality is measured in the eyes of those we serve. Our most important contacts with students occur in teaching and advising

This is a bi-monthly publication, distributed to Penn State administrators and CQI team members. If you have any comments about what you read here, or if you would like to suggest items for future newsletters, please contact Louise Sandmeyer, executive director of the Center for Quality and Planning, or Carol Everett, associate director, at 814-863-8721 or [psucqp@psu.edu](mailto:psucqp@psu.edu). To subscribe or to read past issues, see the Center’s website at <http://www.psu.edu/president/cqi>.

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interactions, but critical interactions also occur in admissions, registration, student aid and career placement offices, and at graduation. It is important that the encounters students have with front line employees who staff the university's offices be productive and pleasant. In other words, university employees must be empowered to solve the problems that students bring to their doorsteps.

**Eliminating Bureaucracy.** 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. For example, students were spending inordinate amounts of time waiting in line in places such as college advising centers, the Bursar's Office, the pharmacy, the library, and computer labs, just to name a few.

These issues and others were addressed by quality improvement teams whose members—working collaboratively and grounded in CQI principles and tools—did away with redundancies, cut down steps, eliminated bureaucracy, and improved processes in many ways that made life better for students.

**Collaborating.** Over the past several years there has been a steady flow of initiatives that have added value to the university by improving the quality of academic programs and enhancing the value of the education that students receive. Many of these initiatives occur in classrooms where the teaching/learning process is based on a collaborative team approach. Courses that embrace teamwork prepare students for employment in today's team-based environment in business and industry. A team environment reflects the values and beliefs of continuous quality improvement: collaborative problem solving, continuous learning, the sharing of a common vision, effective communication, participative decision-making, and respect for one another.

In his State of the University address, President Spanier stresses that students are asking to be greater participants in their own learning experiences. "Eighty-three percent of faculty nationwide report that lecturing is their preferred instructional method," he states, "even while surveys of students say that question-and-answer

periods, team projects, work on problem-based activities, and face time with the instructor were the biggest contributors to a positive learning experience."

### Some Penn State Teams that Focus on the Student

We can point to many examples from the past eleven years where a CQI team at Penn State has changed a process or procedure and improved the lives of students. Following are short descriptions of the activities of several recent CQI teams. The members of these teams knew that their primary stakeholders were students, understood that their work impacted students, and improved their processes to better serve students. These teams would undoubtedly qualify as hallmarks of a student-centered university.

#### Information Technology Services and the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences



Information Technology Services (ITS) at Penn State offers 50 Mb of personal Web space free to every student. A student's e-portfolio is a personalized collection of selected coursework and artifacts of co-curricular activities annotated with reflective commentary that is placed in his or her personal Web space.

David DiBiase, director of the College of Earth and Mineral Sciences e-Education Institute and leader of the e-Portfolios development team, commented in an interview with Charlie Gudeman at the Penn State Quality Expo on May 16, 2002:

*"The most exciting thing for me is to be part of the evolution of a university toward becoming a more student-centered place. And what could be more student-centered than to focus on helping students to create a coherent representation of their entire university careers and to focus attention not just on what instructors ask students to do, but what students do for themselves. I think that the e-portfolio is really going to be the nexus of a student-centered university."*

#### Hearing from Students

Student Affairs is using online surveys to obtain feedback from students. Examples include an online Newspaper Readership survey requesting feedback from a sample of students at 20 Penn State locations, and the 2002 Student Satisfaction online survey for University Park and nine other Penn State campuses.

#### eLion

This academic advising project delivers secure Web-based services to students, academic advisers, faculty and prospective students. Each day, eLion processes thousands of transactions, such as transcript and degree audits, adviser communications, changes of major, and student aid and tuition payments.

#### University Learning Center



The ULC has developed several online resources, including job applications, tutor request forms, a study skills Web site with interactive modules, supplemental instruction on the Web, e-tutoring in writing, and UCL hours and locations.

#### A Student-Centered Office

To better serve its stakeholders, the Student Aid Office 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.

#### Student Progress Reports

Penn State Delaware County's Web-based mid-semester progress report eliminated the two week turn around and now supplies advisors and students with mid-semester performance indicators the same day faculty complete the reports.

#### Electronic Theses and Dissertations

A system was implemented in the Graduate School in Fall 2000 to provide an electronic theses submission option for graduate students.

#### Students Improving the Classroom

Innovation and Quality Teams, sponsored by the Schreyer Institute for Innovation in Learning, create a partnership between students and faculty that allows students to give feedback to faculty while a course is underway, rather than waiting until the end of the semester. The students take the responsibility for developing survey questions, collecting and summarizing the data, and sharing the results with the faculty member.

#### World Campus Help Desk



Through online collaboration, desktop sharing and online resources, World Campus technical support is provided to students around the world.

### **Scheduling Campus Visits**

A new online system in Undergraduate Admissions reserves the date and time for campus visits for nearly 20,000 prospective students and their families and provides the information dynamically in real time. The system also automatically adds the information to the admissions database.

### **University Health Services Pharmacy**

The pharmacy at University Health Services fills 500-800 prescriptions a day, many of these for students. Turnaround time—the time from when a prescription is received to the time it is filled—was too long. The pharmacy is housed in a small area and increasing the number of staff was not an option. The pharmacy staff decided to implement an automated, robotic system to do the manual work of placing medication in bottles and preparing labels, and staff verifies the contents afterward. This change reduced turnaround time, increased the accuracy of prescriptions, and improved customer satisfaction.

## **Fostering a Student-Centered Climate**

In summary, as President Spanier suggests in his State of the University message, 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, because all the activities of these university stakeholders, in the final analysis, impact students.

For more information about other quality improvement teams, visit the Web site, "Quality Spotlights," at <http://qualityspotlight.psu.edu/>