

Quality Endeavors

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Quality Issues Forum Recognizes Teamwork

Celebrating Successful Initiatives

How does the School of Visual Arts envision the ideal undergraduate preparation for art teachers in schools, museums and cultural institutions? How does Undergraduate Admissions provide a Web e-mail system for high school students and guidance counselors that enables them to receive a personal response from a Penn State admissions counselor within 24 hours? How did the College of Agricultural Sciences develop a system for tracking graduate assistantship funding commitments? How did architecture and architectural engineering students conduct an audit to determine the condition of over 300 classrooms at University Park? These stories and other successful initiatives were celebrated on May 5 at the Quality Issues Forum in the Nittany Lion Inn.

Executive Vice President and Provost Rodney Erickson and the Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment sponsored a luncheon in recognition of the outstanding contributions of 91 quality improvement teams formed during the past 12 to 18 months. These teams, representing approximately 500 team members, found numerous opportunities for cost savings and increased efficiencies in their work.

Quality in the Academic and Administrative Units

Keynote speaker for the issues forum, Gary Schultz, Senior Vice President for Finance and Business, has been involved with Penn State's continuous quality improvement endeavors from their very beginning more than a decade ago.

"In the beginning," commented Schultz, "CQI efforts were mainly within the administrative and academic support units. However, with the leadership of the Provost's office, quality improvement efforts are widely spread among the academic units as well. This is not common in higher education."

During the past year, seven academic units sponsored teams:

- Arts and Architecture
- Agricultural Sciences
- Commonwealth College
- Eberly College of Science
- Engineering
- Health & Human Development
- University Libraries

Eleven administrative units are also represented among the 91 teams:

- Undergraduate Admissions
- Career Services
- University Registrar
- Center for Women Students
- Budget Office
- Counseling & Psychological Services
- Faculty Senate
- Office of Human Resources
- Office of Physical Plant
- University Health Services
- Judicial Affairs

Margin of Excellence

Using several sports analogies, Schultz spoke about the concept of the "size of the margin of excellence." For example, Jack Nicklaus is arguable recognized as the best golfer to ever play the game. Nonetheless, Jack Nicklaus won only about 3 percent of the tournaments that he entered. Moving to major league baseball, if you would have a career .300 batting average, you would be a very good player. But if you had a .330 average, just 3 percent higher, you would be

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outstanding and would be a guaranteed hall of famer. If you compare the records of the Chicago Bulls and the Seattle Supersonics during a period in the 1990s, the Bulls won only 3 percent more of their games than the Sonics. Yet, over this same period, the Bulls won six NBA championships while Seattle won zero!

“While there are isolated examples of truly breakthrough improvement in certain processes,” said Schultz, “overall the margin between good and excellent performance is generally relatively small. However, the rewards for excellence are great. So we don’t need to be miles ahead of our competition—often staying ahead by a—‘nose’ is sufficient.”

Changing Landscape

Schultz concluded his remarks by describing the changes on the horizon for higher education, and Penn State specifically. These include:

- ▶ The decline in high school graduates in Pennsylvania
- ▶ The emergence of the for-profit sector of higher education, such as the University of Phoenix
- ▶ As people live longer, competition for State funding from health care and other important needs of the elderly
- ▶ The “brain drain,” or out-migration of young people from the Commonwealth due to the lack of jobs.

“There is no doubt that we will continue to experience change,” said Schultz. “We will best serve Penn State if we proactively *lead* change and take advantage of the many opportunities around us.”

Schultz explained that we can rise to the challenge in many ways. Examples include continuing our leadership in E-Learning and E-Business, meeting the needs of our historically under-represented groups, and continually improving our systems and services to meet the expectations of our students and their parents.

“We have evolved to the point that day-in and day-out our normal expectations are to focus on customer service, teamwork, and continuous improvement,” said Schultz. “I think it is important and necessary that these expectations continue to be reinforced and nurtured.”

Summarizing, Schultz stated, “Finally, we should keep in mind that excellence is often achieved by doing little things right and making small improvements.

Everyone’s efforts to make improvements do make a difference. I am confident that our cumulative efforts will result in great rewards for Penn State faculty, staff, and students.”

Gary Schultz’s slides and a description of the 91 teams formed in 2003–04 that were recognized at the Quality Issues Forum may be viewed on the OPIA Web site at <http://www.psu.edu/president/pia/qif/index.htm>

Since 1991, more than 600 continuous quality improvement teams and other quality initiatives have registered on the Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment’s database. New teams may register in the OPIA database on the Web at <http://www.psu.edu/president/pia/cqi/cqiregistration.htm>

Members of teams formed between May 2004 and April 2005 will be invited to next year’s Quality Issues Forum to be held in the Nittany Lion Inn Ballroom on May 4, 2005.