

INTRODUCTION

Terra Community College began the process of implementing Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) at the college in 1993. One of the significant changes in the organizational structure of the college since that time has been the creation of cross-functional Councils: The Council for Academic and Student Affairs (CASA), Enrollment Management Council, the Planning Council, and the Deans Council. Each of these Councils has representation from all stakeholders on campus and has considerable autonomy in its day-to-day functioning. CASA, in particular, has had a considerable impact on the campus as all issues, policies, and procedures related to academic and student affairs flow through this group.

Because of CASAs influence on campus and the importance of Councils in general in the functioning of the College, Terra decided that participating in the Trailblazer self-assessment process would provide an excellent opportunity for CASA team members to stand back and assess how successful they have been in fulfilling the mission of CASA and employing the principles of CQI. Consequently, a team was formed of CASA members that included Bob Biddinger, Ass't Professor, Physics; Mary Broestl, Coordinator, Learning Resource Center; Julie Dabrunz, student; Tony Crouch, student; Theresa Eishen, Coordinator, Educational Catalyst Center, Acy Jackson, Adjunct Faculty, English; Christine Michael, Registrar; Mary Jo Jay, Academic Advisor; Jim Laremore, Associate Dean for Curriculum; Bob Miller, Dept. Head, Center for Learning Achievement; Lyn Sullivan, Associate Vice President of Institutional Research; Jim Willey, Associate Dean of Transfer and Articulation; and Michelle Younker, Ass't Professor of Mathematics.

CATEGORY 1--LEADERSHIP

The Council for Academic and Student Affairs (CASA) was established in 1997 by Terra Community College's senior leadership. The Council has a written statement of purpose which says in part, "The purpose of CASA is to consider instructional and student services issues, to make policy decisions of a non-financial nature for the college in the instructional and student services areas ..." Further, the operating philosophy of the Council is to act in ways that will ensure that the college has a broad-based forum for important instructional and student services issues, allow open discussion and deliberation, and enable the consideration of all viewpoints or aspects of an issue. The establishment and continued support of CASA by our senior leaders demonstrates their commitment to open communication and a focus on students and stakeholders.

Terra's senior leadership is also committed to quality. The college has been an active participant in the Continuous Quality Improvement Network (CQIN) for a number of years. Our president has served as the president of CQIN and Terra Community College hosted the annual meeting in 1999. All except the newest Terra employees have, at a minimum, attended a 40-hour training seminar in using Total Quality Management tools and processes. A TQM seminar is planned in the fall for those who have not yet received the training. Our participation in Trailblazer and our expected involvement in Pacesetter or in the state quality award process are additional examples of our senior leadership's commitment to quality.

The leadership of CASA follows our statement of purpose and employs total quality management principles in facilitating the operation of the Council. The membership of CASA is representative of the stakeholders involved in the instructional

and student services divisions of the college. Students and adjunct faculty are also represented. All of the CASA's meetings are open and anyone in the college can have an item placed on the agenda and address the Council. As the Council's operating philosophy states, all viewpoints and aspects of an issue should be considered. The goal of the Council is to reach consensus on all issues by encouraging an open dialog and exchange of ideas. This often requires that the leadership of CASA charter teams to investigate the issues and report their findings back to the whole group in the form of recommendations. Teams are always formed with specific goals and timelines so that decisions can be made in a focused and timely manner.

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CATEGORY 2 = STRATEGIC PLANNING

In general, the Council for Academic and Student Affairs does not engage in long term planning. For issues such as curriculum changes and yearly catalog updates, the Council attempts to plan a year in advance to minimize the need for last minute approvals. However, that has not been successful the last two years, so in conjunction with the Curriculum Committee, CASA is currently reviewing the procedures and timelines for curriculum and catalog approvals to streamline the process through improved planning.

We realize that strategic planning offers an opportunity for improvement and the capacity to become more proactive. But, the Council also believes that if we are bogged down with too many predetermined goals and objectives our flexibility and ability to quickly react to the current situation could be hampered. Therefore, long term planning

will probably appear on our list of opportunities for improvement, but we will most likely not try to plan too far into the future.

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CATEGORY 3—STUDENT AND STAKEHOLDER FOCUS

Like any educational institution our primary customer is the student. CASA's role within the institution is to make policy and resolve issues concerning the students' instructional and student services needs. The decisions made in CASA, however, can affect many others outside of the student body. The Council's customers include all college employees, both current and future employers of our students, and other external agencies and constituents.

For students the product provided by the college is the useful knowledge and skills necessary to place them into the job market or to transfer to a university; for faculty and staff the product is workable policies and procedures to assist them in their day to day jobs; and for employers the product is the student who has obtained the knowledge and skills. The service provided by CASA is to institute and review policies and procedures pertaining to instruction and student services, and, in conjunction with the Curriculum Committee, to approve and revise the college curriculum.

The membership on CASA is designed to include this wide range of stakeholders. There is administration, faculty and staff representation from both academic divisions and the student services division. The students and adjunct faculty are also represented. Meetings are open to the whole college community and any student or employee of the college can submit an agenda item and address the Council. Our perception is that we are

easily accessible to our stakeholders. There are no CASA members from the community at large.

The Council uses the Ohio Board Of Regents Operating Manual for Two-Year Campus Programs to ensure that courses and degree programs meet the requirements set forth by the state. Courses and program content and applicability are monitored through the use of Program Review and Student Academic Achievement reports. Our primary tool for self-reflection is the Student Satisfaction Survey. This standardized survey gives us a way to see not only how we are doing internally, but also gives us a comparison to other educational institutions. The data from this survey shows us opportunities for improvement along with highlighting our strengths. CASA also receives valuable input from Student Senate through a student representative and Council members who serve as advisors to our student government group.

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CATEGORY 4—INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS

The Council for Academic and Student Affairs routinely reviews program, curriculum and enrollment data on a continuous basis. Specifically the Council looks at Program Review reports, Curriculum Committee recommendations and decisions, and quarterly enrollment statistics. This data is analyzed for the purposes of improving the quality of instruction, detecting the need for change, coordinating change across the college, monitoring compliance with the Ohio Board of Regents and checking to see if program goals are being met. Our newest source of data that will be collected and analyzed on a regular basis is the Student Satisfaction Survey which has been done one time and will continue biennially. This is our best resource for input from our primary

customers and will become a valuable source of comparative data used within the college for improvement and innovation. The overall intent is to affect continuous quality improvement.

CASA and the teams it charters use a variety of other information as the need arises including, but not limited to, data on retention, transfer and articulation, grade distribution, employment projections, and various focused student surveys.

Benchmarking from similar institutions is often used as a method for either beginning a new project or for comparison. Federal, State and College policies are also referenced.

The majority of the information used is supplied and generated, either wholly or in part, by our office of Institutional Research. The Associate Vice President for Institutional Research is a member of the Council and as such is available at meetings both to learn first hand what information is needed and if necessary to clarify the meaning of the data supplied to CASA.

Most of the data that we collect and analyze relates directly to our students and other stakeholders. While the Council has no budget and therefore cannot make decisions that involve substantial fiscal implications, we do occasionally review financial data such as student fee structure. If CASA has a strong opinion concerning a fiscal issue, a recommendation is made to the Deans Council for a final decision.

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CATEGORY 5—FACULTY AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND MANAGEMENT

CASA does very little in this arena. In the past we have made various recommendations for adjunct faculty development and incentives. We hope that the example we set by forming teams to investigate and solve the problems we encounter

promotes the use of teamwork throughout the institution. In general the topics and questions in this category are handled by our Human Resources department and some permanent teams that have been formed to address specific issues such as employee recognition and safety.

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CATEGORY 6—EDUCATIONAL AND SUPPORT PROCESS MANAGEMENT

The Council for Academic and Student Affairs was created to address the needs of students and other stakeholders. As previously referenced, the Council's Statement of Purpose and Operating Policy requires that we provide support and guidance in both instructional and student services matters. CASA does this by having a broad-based membership and by being receptive to ideas, complaints, questions, and other input from the entire college community. All curriculum, program, course and student services changes or innovations must be reviewed by CASA. In many cases these changes and innovations are initiated by the Council or one of its teams. We attempt to establish policies and procedures that will support all of our stakeholders. Our review of Curriculum Committee decisions and recommendations serves as a quality checkpoint.

Program Review and Student Academic Achievement reports are used both to measure our previous performance and to act as a catalyst for program and process improvement. Both of these reports include input from our program Advisory Boards who are the voice of one of our primary external customers, the employers of our graduates. The first Student Satisfaction Survey showed that our students are relatively satisfied with the college's programs and processes as compared to other institutions, but

CASA is using the data to identify opportunities for improvement in managing our instructional and support processes.

Since the Council has representation from a variety of stakeholders and invites input from the entire college community, the continuous improvement process is often sparked more by chance than by plan. The different perspectives present at each meeting give rise to lively debate even on issues that seem simple and straightforward. This causes the group to closely examine programs, processes, policies and services in search of ways to effect improvement. Although this whole process of debate and review is not explicitly planned, the nature of CASA inevitably spawns this informal structure for continuous process improvement.

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CATEGORY 7—COLLEGE PERFORMANCE RESULTS

All of the self-assessment questions in this category relate to key measures (indicators) of quality and effectiveness. While, in general, CASA receives positive feedback from its constituents and is able to respond quickly to issues as they arise, there are no specific measures in place to monitor quality and effectiveness. Anecdotal data, enrollment trends and student satisfaction surveys could be an indirect indicator of the Council's quality and effectiveness, but a means of direct measurement is lacking.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Through the self-assessment process we have identified three "vital few" opportunities for improvement (OFI). These are communication, evaluation, and planning. Throughout our discussions of the seven categories, these three issues consistently came to the surface.

Communication is a broad topic and our opportunity for improvement in this area covers a wide range of issues including both internal and external communication.

CASA members need to be better informed about the issues that we discuss and about the mission of the Council. It is often times difficult for CASA members to accurately relate information to others outside of the group because at the meeting details are lacking and/or decisions are rushed. The Council also needs to do a better job of informing external customers about our mission, meeting dates and times, agenda and meeting minutes. Adjunct faculty seem to be especially out of the loop. It is not that we fail to communicate with external constituents, but that we need to be more effective in doing so.

The second OFI is to develop a process for measuring, tracking and evaluating all of the things that we do. What effect do our decisions and recommendations have on the student and the college community as a whole? Are we improving quality at the institution? Do the teams that we charter do an effective and timely job? While we have some data that is useful for evaluation of some of our work, it is not used in any organized way for that purpose and we do not have all of the right measurement tools in place. As with communication, we have not ignored this issue, but we could certainly do a better job.

The final opportunity for improvement deals with planning. CASA needs to set goals related to our mission and then periodically review our progress toward the goals and the current applicability of the goals. The mission should also be reviewed at regular intervals both as a means to revise it if necessary and to refresh our memories about the

purpose of the Council. We need to retain our current flexibility but also have an overall plan to keep us on track.

Action Plan

In an effort to improve communication the Council for Academic and Student Affairs will launch three initiatives. The Curriculum Committee will be charged with the task of establishing a set of guidelines and timelines for submission of material to the Council and to itself. This is intended to give council members adequate time to review the issues and standardize the format for the submission of materials. When CASA finalizes and approves these recommendations, they will be published and widely distributed both in electronic and hard copy.

Secondly, we will investigate the possibility of using web-mail and/or a web board to facilitate improved communication among council members. Because of the size of CASA and the diversity of its members, some of the individuals have little contact with one another except at the meetings. Having a centralized communication center for the Council would give everyone easy access to meeting minutes, agenda items and each other.

Finally, we need to review our processes for communication with everyone outside of CASA including faculty, adjunct faculty, staff and students. It is obvious from the discussions generated by the Trailblazer process that the Council can and should do a better job in this area.

Another opportunity for improvement is in tracking and evaluating our performance. There are two components to our action plan for addressing this OFI. First, we will revise our operating procedures for chartered teams to include

implementation and audit dates that will require some form of reporting back to the Council at these predetermined times. Also, we will devise an indexed system (probably computerized) for storing and retrieving historical data such as minutes, agendas and actions taken. Our final action plan is to do a better job of planning. The Council should establish a timetable for regular review and revision (if necessary) of our mission. This along with setting some general goals should help to keep CASA focused on our task.