
Action Project

Institution: University of Saint Mary
Submitted: 2008-03-25

Timeline:

Planned project kickoff date: 2008-03-21
Target completion date: 2008-12-20
Actual completion date:

A. Give this Action Project a short title in 10 words or fewer:

Develop a Client Service Improvement Plan that will be utilized university-wide

B. Describe this Action Project's goal in 100 words or fewer:

The goal is to improve delivery of client service to our internal and external audiences through systemic processes and measurable outcomes. USM's reputation for good client service will improve to exceptional client service (the university will need to define these levels). This will further the university's mission by challenging our employees to reach their professional potential by providing exceptional service, while demonstrating our core value of respect to students. We will establish a service theme and service standards, develop a process for regular service assessment, and train front line staff in areas of improvement identified through the assessment process

C. Identify the single AQIP Category which the Action Project will most affect or impact:

Primary Category: Valuing People

D. Describe briefly your institution's reasons for taking on this Action Project now -- why the project and its goals are high among your current priorities:

Surveys have identified lack of consistent exceptional client service across the organization. While the university has a solid reputation for providing good client service in certain areas, we believe consistency across the university will build our reputation as an institution of superior client service. We will identify ways to improve respectful communication between faculty and staff and our current students, prospective students and their parents to provide exceptional service to students, faculty, and staff. The Client Service Improvement Plan will establish systemic assessment of service delivery through broad participation and feedback loops, and put processes into place to identify employee training opportunities for ongoing education.

E. List the organizational areas - -institutional departments, programs, divisions, or

units -- most affected by or involved in this Action Project:

The Client Service Improvement Plan will affect the entire USM community, primarily our front line areas that are the first points of contact with prospective and new students: Admissions, Financial Aid, the Business Office, and Student Life. The Maintenance Department and Marketing Department will work closely together to improve the university's client service delivery through our physical environment by installing more directional signage to guide our first-time visitors. Maintenance will assist with making aesthetic improvements, starting with our high traffic areas for first-time visitors. Those improvements may include new carpeting, wall touch ups, and better furniture. Marketing will re-design the web to improve the university's virtual environment. We will also work to improve technology service on all campuses.

F. Name and describe briefly the key organizational process(es) that you expect this Action Project to change or improve:

We expect to change and improve new employee orientation, introducing new employees to our service standards and guidelines early on, setting expectations, and enabling them to provide more informed answers to questions from students and parents. We will also train present employees on the new service standards, guidelines, and expectations. Regular surveying of students will help us identify areas of service inconsistencies so we may address concerns before they become service problems. Surveying will also help us gauge whether we have made significant improvement in the eyes of our clients, our students.

G. Explain the rationale for the length of time planned for this Action Project (from kickoff to target completion):

PHASE 1 - Develop the Client Service Improvement Plan and timeline for each action project. Prioritize action projects identified by committee, which will include training of front-line employees, new employee orientation and development of "The Saint Mary Way" resource guide, and physical environment improvements. – TENTATIVE DEADLINE - May 23, 2008

PHASE 2 – Plan and hold employee training sessions and implement a secret shopping process. Continue to re-survey key audiences and react to growth opportunities identified in the surveys. – TENTATIVE DEADLINE - Sept. 30, 2008

PHASE 3 – Follow up and re-survey – TENTATIVE DEADLINE - Nov. 30, 2008.

H. Describe how you plan to monitor how successfully your efforts on this Action Project are progressing:

We will monitor the success of our efforts through regular surveying of students, faculty, and staff, and feedback from secret shoppers. The result should be fewer complaints, increased enrollment, and higher retention.

I. Describe the overall "outcome" measures or indicators that will tell you whether this Action Project has been a success or failure in achieving its goals:

We will complete the Client Service Improvement Plan by May 23, 2008, with specific

goals. Goals will be achieved through the documentation of action steps, which will include identification of responsible party, timeline(s) and metrics reflecting the completion of the action step. The report will also include identification of resources required to implement the various action steps.

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J. Other information (e.g., publicity, sponsor or champion, etc.):

Last Action Project Update: 2008-09-08

A. Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project.

We have developed the Client Service Improvement Plan focusing on four action projects: 1) Develop a Saint Mary Way Resource Guide for all current faculty & staff and future employees outlining service theme, service standards, service guidelines, and dress guidelines, and train faculty and staff on service expectations outlined in the resource guide; 2) Prioritize and provide regular service training to frontline employees; 3) Improve directional signage on main campus; and 4) Develop an ongoing service assessment process.

1-The Saint Mary Way Resource Guide – We established a task force to determine the contents of this guidebook. A smaller group met to discuss how we should approach developing dress guidelines for the university – even debating if we should have them at all, and if we should have different guidelines for frontline staff versus faculty. We determined that we will approach it from the angle of professional dress instills confidence in prospective students and their parents that we care about their education, and how we dress also sends a message that we care. We need to do more research before we can present a draft for faculty and staff feedback. We also need to clearly define what exceptional service is at USM. Our tentative deadline for distribution of the resource guide is Feb. 20, 2009.

2-Service Training – We established a frontline employee service training task force from the AQIP Client Service Improvement Committee to determine and prioritize training topics. We held our first training session on “Telephone Excellence” on July 9, 2008, attended by 44 staff members. The program is on DVD and those who missed the training will sign up for a make-up session before the end of 2008.

Our next training session is scheduled for Sept. 24 on “How to be a Better Supervisor: Getting Employees Motivated.” We also have a daylong workshop planned for Oct. 17 on “Making a Powerful and Positive First Impression,” when we will bring in a business etiquette expert who will address How to Make Introductions / The Art of Conversation / How to Be Heard / How to Work a Room / How to Have Presence/ Professional Dress in Higher Ed. We will also have a guest speaker from NRCCUA who can speak about the importance of first impressions in higher education recruitment. We timed this to coincide with our Oct. 24 Main Campus Open House and Nov. 11 Overland Park Campus Information Session and to assist the development team in fundraising efforts. Future training sessions include “Dealing with Angry Clients and Parents” and “Understanding How Actions of Today Impact Tomorrow.” Our original goal was to complete all five training sessions by Nov. 30, 2008, but it has been difficult to squeeze all of them in by this date. We are trying to keep the training sessions to one per month. We may need to extend our training completion goal to Jan. 31, 2009. We are videotaping all sessions so they can be utilized as part of new employee orientation.

3-Physical Setting - Improve Signage – A physical environment subcommittee conducted a field exercise, visiting campus as a prospective parent, student, faculty member, and various other visitor roles to see our campus setting from the viewpoint of our guests. Engaging all of our senses, we wrote in journals what we discovered that might have a negative impact on impressions of Saint Mary. We regrouped, discussed our discoveries, and prioritized what the university’s physical improvements should be to address negative messages being sent about our setting: Priority 1: Improve signage. Priority 2: Improve cosmetics, particularly floors and walls. Priority 3: Replace, repair, and refurbish old furniture. A smaller, signage task force met in April 2008 and decided we should focus the next academic year on interior signage, mainly office directories and restroom signage, and then take a look at main office signage. We did install a directory inside the main entrance in time for freshman orientation on Aug. 16, 2008, and posted several temporary signs to help students and parents make their way around campus.

4-Ongoing Service Assessment- An assessment task force met to determine how and when we want to survey students and parents. We will survey main campus new parents at freshman orientation in August. We will survey new main campus students two times a year – 4 weeks into fall and spring classes. We will survey Overland Park Campus students two times a year – 4 weeks into Fall I and 3 weeks before the end of Spring II.

We still need to establish a secret shopper procedure. We also plan to add “How are we

doing?” comment boxes near the Admissions Office at main campus and the Overland Park Campus by Oct. 31, 2008.

We surveyed main campus new parents on Aug. 16, 2008. General feedback compared to a similar survey conducted in 2007 was that service satisfaction had improved. Unlike 2007, no individual staff or faculty members were named as providing poor customer service. There were a handful of complaints related to processes – billing and financial aid, difficulty finding the academic schedule on the web, and difficulty getting campus email accounts to work. We will share this feedback with those department heads.

We still need a formal statistical analysis of hard copy survey data which we hope to have by Sept. 30, 2008. We will survey new main campus students later in September during one of the Learning Communities classes using an online survey that will automatically compile and analyze the data.

Hard copy surveys to Overland Park Campus students in May 2008 showed improvement over a similar survey in May 2007. General satisfaction had improved and we did not have nearly as many references to dissatisfaction with eSpire, our web secure portal, or billing procedures related to employer reimbursement. We worked with Information Services last summer to address 2007 student eSpire concerns. New OPC student orientation and new adjunct faculty orientations began at OPC in August 2007 during which IS presented information about how to use eSpire. These orientations are now held regularly at OPC. Dr. Jill Hackett, vice president of extended sites, has worked with business office processes to help iron out billing processes. We will move to an electronic survey for OPC for our next student service assessment later this month.

B. Describe how the institution involved people in work on this Action Project.

We have made a conscious effort to seek input from both faculty and staff from the main campus and extended sites. The subcommittees and task forces allowed for more involvement of Client Service Improvement committee members. The whole process of surveying requires involvement across several departments. We also worked in concert with the USM Mission Council to reinforce the importance of one of our core values, respect, and how that impacts service to our students in the messages we send in how we treat each other.

C. Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project.

This month, we will begin distributing a regular monthly employee newsletter called SpireWorks in an effort to make employees more knowledgeable and enable them to deliver a higher level of service to our students.

We need to complete the Saint Mary Way Resource Guide and post it to our shared drive for university-wide feedback. We would like to print and distribute this at the Feb. 20, 2009, all faculty/staff morning workshop. We would also like to spend some time going over the resource guide and educating employees of service expectations.

We need to schedule two remaining front line employee training sessions before the end of the year. We also need to develop a training program for graduate assistants and student works, especially those in Admissions and Development.

As a result of working on this action project, we have identified the need to develop a more formal new employee orientation process that occurs very soon after a new employee begins work at USM. We will form a new task force to develop our plan for new employee orientation.

D. Describe any "effective practice(s)" that resulted from your work on this Action Project.

The regular surveying provides a vehicle for students and parents to bring certain issues of concern to our attention with some anonymity and also affords us the opportunity to measure whether our service improvement efforts have had positive impact. The assessment of our physical setting forced us to constantly look at our physical environment and how it impacts the guest experience through the eyes of our clients. We plan to make regular sweeps of main campus buildings in search of setting concerns that should be addressed.

E. What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project?

We have some ground to cover on university buy-in, although I believe we have made some headway in changing the name of the project to Client Service Improvement versus Customer Service Improvement.

We have also been challenged in tabulating results from hard copy surveys. We are moving toward all future surveys being done electronically so results are automatically tabulated.

F. If you would like to discuss the possibility of AQIP providing you help to stimulate progress on this action project, explain your need(s) here and tell us who to contact and when?
