

**The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory**

**San Juan College: Designing a Communications and Input Process for San Juan College**

<b>Project Details</b>	
<b>Title</b>	Designing a Communications and Input Process for San Juan College
<b>Category</b>	5-Leading and Communicating
<b>Timeline</b>	
<b>Planned Project Kickoff</b>	08-17-2007
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**1: Project Accomplishments and Status**

**A:** The key organizational processes that this action project was designed to address include communications, decision making and planning. Advances have been made in all three areas, with the most significant change being broader College-wide involvement and more open discussion of these key processes through multiple means, including focus groups, group meetings with representation from multiple campus groups, and group presentations to the Executive Leadership Team.

PACE survey results served as the foundation of six focus groups in fall 2010 which were designed to learn more about (1) the extent to which open and ethical communication is practiced at this institution, and (2) the extent to which decisions are made at the appropriate level at this institution. The Team for Strategic Oversight (TSO) and Executive Leadership Team (ELT) met twice, and later also with relevant AQIP category team leaders, to review survey results and the TSO's recommended improvement strategies. The TSO report was shared with the Board of Trustees as a part of broadening consideration of the PACE survey results. This report and one presented by the faculty in November of 2010, offered useful suggestions to facilitate more two-way, respectful, and collaborative communication and planning.

The subsequent removal of the president by the Governing Board and the installation of an acting president led to a renewed TSO charge to benchmark and recommend an employee association model for SJC. This proposed model has been drafted and presented to the Executive Leadership Team for discussion and feedback. A by-laws template has been drafted by the TSO to serve as a common framework for the association groups (i.e., faculty, professional staff and support staff) to guide creation of their specific association bylaws. The goal is to implement a representative body of all respective employee associations to advise the President and executive leadership group and other committees to promote College improvement, open communication, and mutual understanding within and between each work group, design of professional development opportunities, and input into institutional planning and decision making. The TSO has presented the association model and a tactical team has presented a related communications, decision making and planning model to the interim President and Executive Leadership Team, and will share an updated version with a larger group of cross-campus committee members in mid fall semester.

The building of a new strategic plan has also included focus groups, cross-campus planning teams, community interviews, and open forums. The first version of the strategic planning process was centered on the work of one planning committee, the Strategic Planning Oversight Team (SPOT). With a change in presidents, this model was broadened to make it possible for any College employee to contribute and for members from multiple professional sectors of the community to contribute as well. A later extension of this broad input model included extensive individual interviews with community members so the strategic plan would include both internal and external perspectives.

Our AQIP category five team has received initial approval for a new model for structuring committee work and the communication and flow of proposals between committees and relevant campus leaders to facilitate decision making and planning. A common format for committee agendas and minutes is being piloted this fall. New web structures are being planned to make committee information more readily available to the larger campus community.

Finally, a consulting firm is being hired to help in the identification of the College's next president. Again, a search model is being used that will provide an opportunity for College members to contribute to creating the position description and priorities. The method of using multi-group meetings and open forums has proved to be a positive new way to communicate multiple perspectives and to make plans and decisions based on broad input.

- R:** San Juan College is nearing completion of this three year action project. The institution is making reasonable progress toward completion of the project and development of an institution-wide continuous quality improvement culture. This action project is focused on the review and modification of the process by which information about the institution is communicated to and between institutional stakeholders. (AQIP Category 1 – Helping Students Learn; AQIP Category 3 – Understanding Students' and other Stakeholders' Needs; AQIP Category 6 – Supporting Institutional Operations; AQIP Category 7 – Measuring Effectiveness)
- As the project progresses, the project team has identified stakeholder feedback as a critical element. All institutional stakeholders are represented through the project committee and focus groups have been conducted. In addition, a detailed survey of stakeholder perceptions is being used to gauge the degree to which stakeholder needs are being met. Given the importance of this project to institutional mission, San Juan College has devoted significant time and effort to understanding the state of the process and determining how the effectiveness of the processes can be measured. Research into the literature and an examination of best practices at peer institutions are also likely elements of the team's work. (AQIP Category 1 – Helping Students Learn; AQIP Category 3 – Understanding Students' and other Stakeholders' Needs; AQIP Category 6 – Supporting Institutional Operations; AQIP Category 7 – Measuring Effectiveness; AQIP Category 8 – Planning Continuous Improvement)

## **2: Institution Involvement**

**A:**

SJC involved faculty, staff and students in the inter-related set of projects as follows: (1) Faculty, professional and support staff provided service on the TSO and on the strategic planning oversight committees (SPOT); (2) Faculty, professional staff, support staff and students participated in the focus groups and/or open forums that contributed to the development of initial draft strategic planning goals; (3) the President and Executive Leadership Team met with TSO, SPOT members, and members of AQIP category teams to discuss options for a communication structure that would provide broad input into planning and decision making; a mid-fall semester meeting will add President's Cabinet members to this group as a part of the process to refine plans for work-group associations and pathways for contributing proposals and recommendations for planning and decision making; (4) TSO members and others served on a tactical planning team to provide a proposal for an overall College communications structure that provides broad input into College planning and decision making; (5) the TSO year-end report and a faculty report were shared with the Board of Trustees and the SPOT proposals for updated mission documents and strategic planning goals have been shared with the Board for their input and approval (at this time, the Board has approved the updated mission documents; approval of the final strategic planning goals is now pending consideration of the new information coming into the process from the external community interviews); and (6) a cross-campus group of the Executive Leadership Team, technical school deans, economic development program directors, and community outreach staff have initiated meetings to begin the discussions about options for an organizational structure that will facilitate the achievement of economic development goals that have already surfaced through initial community interviews and partnerships with community economic development bodies in the county and beyond.

- R:** San Juan College is demonstrating good attention to the inclusion of all project stakeholders. The use of the PACE instrument to gather feedback is noteworthy, as are the multi-faceted cross-committee meetings and focus groups. A solid understanding of the needs of all institutional stakeholders will facilitate a more complete understanding of the nature of the process strengths and weaknesses, and the steps that will need to be taken to increase process effectiveness. If it has not already done so, the team may wish to consider creating a more formalized stakeholder feedback system, perhaps through the use of the appropriate information technology such as websites. The use of the institutional web site to provide a central repository of the most up to date information may prove useful. (AQIP Category 4, valuing people; AQIP Category 3 – Understanding Student's and other Stakeholder's Needs)

### **3: Next Steps**

- A:** Next steps for the institution include the implementation of fall semester joint meetings of multiple campus groups to consider proposals for processes and structures to enhance campus-wide contributions to communication, planning, and decision making. The approved communication plan will clarify and affirm the role of committees, associations, and various short and long-range work groups in sharing information and proposals that enable the College to reach the goals outlined in the new strategic plan.
- R:** The actions taken to date, and the plan for project completion, represent logical steps. Because of the large number of stakeholders impacted by this process, and the associated integrated support processes, the institution should consider developing specific actions for evaluating the effectiveness of the changes that result. Some of these changes may prove to be more useful than others in improving process effectiveness. Follow-on use of the PACE instrument will allow for longitudinal tracking of performance. Focus groups of students, faculty, and staff may also prove useful.
- The project schedule has been impacted by the change in senior leadership and the formulation of a new strategic plan. To some extent, this has presented a "moving target" to the project team. The team is encouraged to continue to stabilize the scope of this project and to develop a plan for formal project close-out and transition from a project to an ongoing institutional process. (AQIP Category 1 – Helping Students Learn; AQIP Category 6 – Supporting Institutional Operations; AQIP Category 7 – Measuring Effectiveness)

**4: Resulting Effective Practices**

- A:** (1) Implementing this action plan included joint meetings of representatives of several key committees: TSO, AQIP Category Teams, the Strategic Planning Oversight Team, President's Cabinet, and Executive Leadership Team (ELT) members. These new cross-committee meetings are providing the opportunity for significant discussion, consideration of multiple goals and view points, and creation of a new organizational communications, decision making, and planning structure.
- (2) Despite the firing of a president and the appointment of an interim president, the College was able to continue to work with recommendations of the TSO and the faculty to develop more inclusive communication, planning and decision making processes that utilize broader campus and community involvement. This work is laying the foundation for faculty and staff associations and the piloting of more consistent communication mechanisms for committees. The goals of this work were preserved and advanced in spite of the change in presidents and several leadership positions.
- (3) Focus groups provide an important avenue to assess needs and to gather feedback to guide the development of new processes and communication strategies. We learned the importance of having well-respected, professional focus-group facilitators and extending personal invitations to encourage campus members to participate.
- (4) We are finding positive results when multiple workgroups or committees meet together. This has been the case as noted above, and is now going to be used to share learning from the CQIN group that has returned from a national conference with proposals for ways to deepen the College brand, improve quality services, and contribute to enhanced development of employees across the College.
- R:** The comprehensive approach taken, and the new processes developed, are noteworthy. These new capabilities will likely result in a more effective process. San Juan College is encouraged to share the results of these initiatives with the broader academic community via publication. (AQIP Category 8 – Planning Continuous Improvement)

**5: Project Challenges**

- A:** Perhaps the biggest challenge will be the full implementation of the emerging communications, decision making and planning processes when the College again experiences a new executive leader in the 2012-13 academic year. New processes (focus groups, forums open to the whole College, cross-committee group meetings, broader use of survey and other institutional data, and benchmarking) have helped to build a broader base of support for new goals and initiatives. Final approval of the proposals for facilitating broader input into communications, planning, and decision making is currently pending. When approved and implemented, the new processes will facilitate broad sharing of information across the campus and broader consideration of employee, student, and community input into planning and decision making.
- R:** The improved sharing of information across the institution, and the support that has been developed over the course of the project, should pay dividends as the institution continues its transition to a new leadership structure and develops a new strategic plan. Continued attention by the project team to stakeholder inclusion, especially the new senior leadership, should ensure that the process improvements are fully accepted by all institutional stakeholders. An interesting question will be the extent to which a better process results in more effective institutional decision making and planning. This will doubtless be difficult measure, but the institution is encouraged to make the attempt – perhaps through a subsequent action project. (AQIP Category 7 – Measuring Effectiveness; AQIP Category 8 – Planning Continuous Improvement)