

**Business Services Outreach Program**

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## **Abstract**

The Business Services Outreach Initiative was designed to improve communication and consistency of communication throughout Delta College, as implemented by and relating to the Business Services department. This initiative encourages one-on-one dialogue and proactive communication in an effort to work more collaboratively with other departments. We have been able to improve the level of service provided to college departments based on this specialized approach and have achieved a deeper understanding of the needs of the customer. The Outreach Initiative gives support staff an opportunity for job growth and professional development in communication and leadership, areas where they normally have not had a chance to develop and fully utilize their skills and abilities. Outcomes of the Business Services Outreach Initiative include increased teamwork and improved morale in the business office staff, efficiencies created by balancing the work flow among staff, increased use of a problem solving approach and improvement in the college's perception of Business Services. We are viewed as being friendly, helpful and effective rather than as a roadblock. As a result of this program, Business Services has found there to be increased understanding of Business Services programs, policies, and guidelines, as well as enhanced relationships with each of the college departments.

## **Introduction of the Organization**

Delta College is a comprehensive community college located on a 640 acre campus in Bay County, Michigan. Since opening in 1961, Delta College has provided educational opportunities to residents primarily located in three counties, Saginaw, Midland and Bay. This tri-county area is one of the major concentrations of population within the state. The most recent census reports indicate an area population of approximately 400,000.

Delta College is centrally located within the district and the main campus lies midway between the three counties' major cities. This triangle forms the heart of the Saginaw Valley area and is adjacent to the Saginaw Bay. The Saginaw Bay is an important recreational area and waterway whose ports are part of the St. Lawrence Seaway system.

In addition to the main campus, Delta College also has a major center in each county, including the Delta College Planetarium and Learning Center in Bay City. The main campus is noted for its miles of nature trails, tennis courts, running and fitness trails, Fitness and Recreation Center and beautifully landscaped courtyard garden.

Under the marketing slogan, "The Delta Difference: Quality, Affordability and Personal Attention," over 10,000 students attend classes each year, producing over 90,000 credit hours. The College's Corporate Services Division is a regional, state and national leader in the training of workers from a wide range of companies. Annually, Corporate Services trains over 42,000 workers locally, state-wide, nationally and internationally.

There is no typical Delta College student. Students differ considerably in their ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds and their educational goals. Most students (83.9%) reside in the tri-county district and they typically work full or part time and attend college on a part time basis.

Approximately two-thirds of students enrolled for six or more academic credits receive some form of financial aid. Over the years, students have been asked about their reasons for choosing and attending Delta and the five major reasons given have been: location of Delta (close to home and/or work); curriculum or programs offered; low costs; course work relevant to goals; quality of instruction. Surveys also indicate that 90% of Delta career occupational graduates find jobs locally and within the State of Michigan. Hundreds more continue their education by successfully transferring to senior universities.

Delta College is a charter member of the National League for Innovation in Community Colleges. Delta's membership in the League of Innovation affirms that it is devoted to the improvement of learning through experimentation and innovation. Participation in League activities enables the College to adapt and adopt those innovative practices which have proved effective elsewhere, while sharing the results of its own innovations with colleges in other districts.

Delta College is accredited by The Higher Learning Commission and is a member of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA). Initial accreditation was granted the College in October 1962 by the Michigan Commission on College Accreditation. Under the leadership of President Jean Goodnow, Delta College has been accepted as a member of the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) sponsored by our regional accrediting agency, the Higher Learning Commission.

The College is committed to becoming an institution dedicated to continuous quality improvement. As part of AQIP application process and moving the college towards continuous quality improvement, a college-wide Summit was held in March 2006. Over 450 people

participated, including members of the Board of Trustees, faculty, staff, students and community members.

As a result of this Summit, the College has new Mission, Vision and Values statements. The Mission of Delta College states: Delta College is a responsive, dynamic community college. We educate, inspire, challenge and support a diverse community of learners to achieve academic, professional and personal excellence. The Vision of the College is to be the communities' first choice to learn, work and grow. The College's Values state: Delta College is a diverse learning-centered community based on integrity and respect. From a foundation of leadership, we use innovation and teamwork to achieve excellence.

Delta College has sufficient financial resources to fulfill its mission, due largely to a long-standing philosophy of sound financial management with a focus on fiscal integrity and planning for future generations. Despite cuts in state funding for the past five years, the College remains financially strong and well situated for future financial sustainability.

With a budget of approximately \$55 million, the sources of revenue include property tax (41%), state aid (23%), tuition and fees (34%) and other (2%). The College developed a comprehensive facility master plan in the early 1990's to address its aging facilities originally constructed in the early 1960's. The past decade has seen an investment of approximately \$80 million in the College, including a new Library and Learning Information Center, science classrooms and labs; health, wellness and aquatics facilities; expanded Manufacturing and Technical Trades Complex; a Digital Television Broadcasting Center, a Corporate, Small Business, Technology and Workforce Development Center; renovated Bookstore and Food Service; and student spaces as well as general upgrades throughout the campus and grounds.

Delta College has a staff of over 500 full time employees including 215 full time faculty

and 285 part time faculty. The average years of service for a Delta College employee are 14. Over 50% of employee turnover is due to retirements. The College has enjoyed 40 years of shared governance. The Delta College Senate is the internal governance structure of faculty and administrative/professional staff whose purpose is to initiate, recommend and facilitate college governance matters. It provides an avenue of communication and involvement for college faculty, staff and students.

### **Statement of the problem/initiative**

As with many organizations, it is challenging to get all staff working on the same page, as well as communicating a consistent message throughout the organization. Delta College is no different. Our Business Services department is involved in many different areas of the college -- - procurement, technology, special events, contract administration, accounts payable, auxiliary services marketing and administration, and project implementation.

This past year, Delta College identified a new strategic plan and strategic focus areas. In an effort to direct our efforts to those strategic focus areas, Delta College's Business Services department created and implemented the Business Services Outreach Program.

Because of the service nature of our department, we took this new direction as a way to transform our image within the College, and to take a more proactive approach to the way we conduct business and provide service to the College community.

Our departmental goal was to change the way we have always done things to become a more proactive department in communicating procedures and important information as well as work to be stronger ambassadors for our department and the College in general. The Business Services Outreach Program ties directly to all five of Delta College's Strategic Focus Areas:

Student Success, People Focus, Program & Service Excellence, Financial Stability and Community Relationships.

### **Design**

After identifying that both communication and consistency in communication were areas which we could have an impact, we began identifying ways in which we could address these issues with both a limited budget and limited staffing resources. Initially, a concept of the program was developed to identify our big picture thinking --- specifically, what would be the benefits to Delta College, responsibilities of our staff, materials needed and the timeline for implementation.

The initiative was done with existing staff, with minimal impact on the day to day work load, and minimal budgetary implications. It required some staff training and ongoing support as the initiative evolved. Examples of the support include standard communication templates, presentation outlines and training and role playing in staff meeting in-service sessions.

During the planning stage, we outlined the objectives of what we hoped to accomplish and the type and frequency of information that would be communicated. We also worked with key administrators to identify their departments to be included and the contact person for each. With that information, we distributed the departmental contacts between each of our Business Services staff, with each of our six staff being responsible for approximately 10 to 16 departments. In making the distribution we looked at the logical distributions, staff interest or knowledge, and currently working relationships. All business services staff was offered the opportunity to participate and 100% of the support staff and administrative professional committed to being part of the outreach initiative.

To develop this program to its current status required an initial investment of time on the part of our staff. Materials were developed to include in a “Get to Know Us” packet, which includes information specific to the Business & Auxiliary Services departments, including: departmental newsletter, travel guidelines, at-a-glance statistics for our department, meet the staff, a “who to call” quick reference guide, a guide to Business & Auxiliary Services, as well as departmental specific information. Special care was taken to ensure the information contained would be relative and informative, without being overwhelming. These materials are also available on the departmental website.

### **Implementation**

The timeline was aggressive. Between the time we finalized our concept and responsibilities until we implemented the program with faculty and staff, there was a period of approximately four weeks. During those weeks, materials and communications were developed to distribute in our “Get to Know Us” packet.

Our first communication introduced the program, the purpose, and the benefits to Delta College as a whole. Packets of information were distributed, and follow-up telephone calls were made to ensure the staff received the information and to answer any questions generated.

A process has been identified with Human Resources so that Business Services is notified as new employees are hired. Once hired, our assigned staff reaches out to those employees and sends them a welcome email which contains information regarding the Business Office including specifics as to how their position might interact with our office. As an example, a person hired in a support position would have a message tailored to them which would include information

about office supply ordering, or an administrative staff member may have information included relating to contract administration and travel procedures.

Shortly after the email welcome is sent, a packet of information is forwarded to the new staff member as a follow-up. This includes the current newsletter of Business Services; a Guide to Business & Auxiliary Services, which identifies each of our auxiliary departments and a brief departmental overview; Business Services At-a-Glance, which identifies statistics for our department such as number of vouchers and purchase orders processed annually, cost savings, number of vendors utilized, etc.; and a quick reference sheet of who to call when an employee has questions about any number of things that for which our office is responsible.

It is helpful to keep a master calendar with notations about when certain information should be communicated to faculty and staff as this insures that they are receive relevant and timely information. This is beneficial when there are year-end dates, changes to the vouchering deadline, or any upcoming changes to procedures or guidelines.

When dividing staff responsibilities, it is advisable to divide the departmental contacts based on area of service, i.e., Student Services, Academics, Auxiliaries, etc., in order to maintain a more cohesive flow of communications.

### **Benefits**

This change in the way we conduct day-to-day business and communicate ultimately provides our department with the opportunity to develop stronger relationships with individual divisions and departments throughout the College. We have been able to maintain regular communication with college staff and anticipate needs with individual departments, allowing us to be proactive in many cases rather than reactive.

As a result of Delta College's Business Services Outreach Initiative, many benefits have been realized.

New employees feel welcomed by our department and many have expressed that they have appreciated receiving this information. They also feel comfortable in knowing if they have a question, they can call one of us for assistance. If it is not our area of expertise, we work with the individual to get them to the right person, so that they don't have to make a number of phone calls or get frustrated by not knowing who to call. Based on the comments and feedback received by this program, we know our new faculty and staff feel very welcomed and part of the college. Recently, one of those new faculty members came to our office to introduce himself and thank us for welcoming him and getting him the information. He appreciated knowing there was someone he could call if he needed anything.

Departmental staff feels that they are aware of things that are happening that have an impact on what they do, rather than finding out at separate times or with inconsistent messages. In our monthly updates to the divisions and departments, we have communicated information such as: changes in dates for accounts payable; mileage rate changes and changes in travel procedures; what we are doing for students; open houses and vendor shows; updates to the websites, etc. Response has been positive and the administrators, deans, and division chairs often pass this information on to their staff.

Part of our Outreach program includes making our entire Business Services staff available to attend any division or departmental meetings to talk about procedures, what we do and how it impacts them. We have had the opportunity to attend many meetings as a result and it is giving our department and our staff greater exposure, and also making other staff more comfortable in calling us with questions, because now they know who we are.

The Business Services Outreach Program has also resulted in changes to or the addition of many programs and/or guidelines. As a result of feedback we hear through continual communication with our contacts, we have streamlined our travel procedures to make it a less cumbersome process and to achieve cost savings.

Other departments within Delta College have approached us about this program, why and how it was developed, and the results, because they are interested in creating similar programs within their departments. This is in an effort to foster more cohesive interdepartmental relationships, which ultimately will result in improvements throughout the college.

Another benefit to the College is that Business Services is able to lead projects that are a part of the continuous quality improvement in support of the College's strategic initiatives. This is in part due to our staff having frequent communication with each of their assigned departments to know what issues or concerns are having an impact on what they do.

Overall, the benefits we have realized far outweigh any additional responsibilities our staff has assumed, and our staff is in agreement with this assessment.

## **Retrospect**

As we assess the Outreach Initiative, we have identified several other topics that should have been included and we are working to add these to the program. The ongoing contact with departments provides continual feedback about procedures and/or processes that are not serving the needs of the college community. The college's strategic planning efforts resulted in community relationships being established as a strategic focus area. Based on input from the Outreach contacts involved in planning special events for their departments, special event guidelines have been redesigned so that faculty and staff have clear expectations of their

responsibilities, access to support resources and the availability of a “how to” guide to special event planning. In retrospect, had we known then what we know now, we would have developed the master calendar at the beginning of the project so that the focus of each of the communications was clear from the start. Additionally, if we would have had a larger staff, we would have divided the departments by service area of the College.

We did not plan an effective assessment model prior to implementation of this initiative. We have made considerable progress and have now have written key performance indicators relating to the Outreach Initiative. At the end of each academic year, we intend to conduct focus groups and surveys to gain additional feedback about the initiative, customer satisfaction with services provided by business services and suggestions for improvement. The data collected will be used to measure the number of departments and individuals contacted, departmental meetings attended and process improvements successfully implemented and then compared to the goals established annually.

Overall, we are very pleased with the Business Services Outreach Program and the positive outcomes it has created for both the college and the business services department.