

The Higher Learning Commission Action Project Directory

Joliet Junior College

Project Details			
Title	Review and establish best practices for governance across the college.	Status	ACTIVE
Category	5-Leading and Communicating	Updated	09-26-2013
Timeline		Reviewed	10-07-2013
	Planned Project Kickoff 01-01-2011	Created	12-13-2010
	Target Completion 09-15-2013	Version	3

1: Project Goal

A: The purpose of this action project is to establish a formalized governance structure that will accomplish the following objectives. First, a clear governance structure will define communications channels, acting as a recognized forum and reducing reliance on more informal channels for information, like rumor mills or the grapevine. Second, it will clarify how decisions are made by reducing ambiguity. Third, a clear governance structure will provide a clear pathway for employees to bring innovative and systematic ideas for improvement. Pursuing and completing this project will provide a forum for employees to bring their passion for students and clarify organizational procedures and processes.

2: Reasons For Project

A: JJC is undertaking this project right now for the following reasons:

JJC and the surrounding community are witnessing unprecedented growth and change. Projections show this will continue for several decades. As the college grows, it is imperative that structures exist for stakeholders to be heard and have input.

Employees report governance, communications, and a lack of decision-making processes as problematic. Three improvement trends stand out when examining the past two years of the PACE Survey: 1) Employees feel that communications is a significant issue at JJC; 2) Employees feel they need more input into major institutional decisions; and 3) There is a lack of clearly defined organizational processes for getting work done. Additionally, there is a concern about the level in which decisions are made and structure.

- On a positive note, employees feel JJC is student-focused and that students are generally satisfied with their experiences. Additionally, employees note positive relationships with their direct supervisors and feel they have the latitude to be flexible and creative in their work. A clear governance structure can channel this passion into larger institutional improvement efforts.
- The lack of a clear governance structure can impact institutional effectiveness. While JJC has much to celebrate, there are areas in need of improvement. A clear governance structure can enhance improvement efforts by fostering collaboration and sharing best practices.

Historically, JJC has responded to increased calls for greater input in institutional decision-making and better communications by either adding more people to committees, soliciting departmental representatives in the hopes of facilitating cross-departmental communications, creating new newsletters and sending emails, open forums, or soliciting input from surveys. While well-intentioned and effective in some ways, the evidence shows that the cumulative effects of these efforts have had little impact on improved communications, trust, or input on decisions. (To be fair, these efforts have been utilized precisely due to the lack of a clear governance structure).

3: Organizational Areas Affected

A: Departments and Units:

- Academic Affairs
- Communications & External Relations
- Human Resources
- Institutional Research & Effectiveness
- Seven collective bargaining units (full-time faculty, adjunct faculty,

Currently existing governance structures:

- Senior Leadership Team
- Administrative Council
- Department Chairs (academic departments)

4: Key Organizational Process(es)

- A:
- Budgeting
 - Academic planning
 - Strategic planning
 - Operational planning

5: Project Time Frame Rationale

A: **Fall 2010** – Establish a task force to begin conversations about establishing governance. This task force has already been established and is currently being led by the vice presidents of academic affairs and institutional advancement & research.

Spring 2011 – The task force conducts an exploratory phase through the following activities:

1. **Campus Visits:** Visits to other campuses as part of the research phase will provide practical feedback about how to implement shared governance. Two community colleges in Illinois recently implemented governance and created action projects around them – the College of Lake County (Grayslake, IL) and Lincoln Land College (Springfield, IL).
2. **Meetings with Unions:** There are seven bargaining units at JJC. Nearly every employee, except for administrative and professional staff, are part of a union. Unions also play an integral role in the surrounding region and district. Therefore, it is extremely important to engage the unions and keep the lines of communications open. Several contracts will be negotiated this year, including the full-time faculty contract in spring 2011.
3. **Meetings with Other Governance Groups on Campus:** The following groups should be engaged: administrative council, academic department chairs, and student government.
4. **Research:** Initial meetings can be informational and also an opportunity to ask a set of questions. A framework for the meeting can consist of addressing the following questions. We can also add governance questions to the PACE Survey in the spring, as follows:
 - What is your view of the current governance system? What works and what does not work?
 - How do you think current issues are processed through the governance system, if at all?
 - What types of issues should and should not go through the governance system?
 - What is the timeline to process issues through the system?
 - (These questions are adapted from the College of Lake County Governance Project and provided courtesy of Ali O'Brien, Assistant Vice President for Workforce Education).

Summer 2011 – Evaluation of the research and the completion of a report.

Fall 2011 – At the beginning of the fall semester, the report will be shared with the campus. At this point, the task force will need to establish an evaluation matrix based around the categories of that we have identified as issues and any other new ones that may come up, including communications, decision-making, and organizational processes. “Town hall” meetings will need to be set up to discuss the report’s findings and discuss implications for the college.

Spring 2012 – The spring can be spent in two activities. First, the task force can craft a draft governance structure and process for the college. Second, a final review period can be conducted for further feedback.

Summer 2012 – Pre-work for implementation.

Fall 2012 – Implementation of the new governance structure.

6: Project Success Monitoring

A: A task force from administrative council, representing each division of the college, will be responsible for bringing information back to their departments and divisions.

We can also use all of the college's currently existing communications processes, including the *Weekly Newsletter*, website, new portal, email, and meetings.

7: Project Outcome Measures

A: As described above, the three main areas of concern related to governance are communications, decision-making, and clarifying organizational processes. An evaluation should be built around these goals and how the actual AQIP project is being implemented.

The primary vehicle we can use for evaluating the project is the college's annual employee survey, the Personnel Assessment of the College Environment (PACE). Specific questions to governance are described in the bullet points below. We also have the flexibility to add customized questions specific to governance.

Communications Questions from the PACE survey

- The extent to which information is shared within the institution (item 10)
- The extent to which I receive adequate information regarding important activities at this institution (item 41)
- The extent to which communication occurs effectively up, down, and across different units of the organization (item 48, customized)

Decision-making Questions from the PACE survey

- The extent to which decisions are made at the appropriate level at this institution (item 6)
- The extent to which I am able to appropriately influence the direction of this institution (item 15)
- The extent to which a spirit of cooperation exists at this institution (item 25)
- The extent to which politics play a role in the way decisions are made (item 50)

Organizational Process Questions from the PACE survey

- The extent to which my work is guided by clearly defined administrative processes (item 44)
- The extent to which institutional teams use problem-solving techniques (item 11)
- The extent to which institution-wide policies guide my work (item 29)
- The extent to which this institution is appropriately organized (item 32)

Project Update

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: The president, senior leadership team (SLT), administrators, and professionals from across the college (53 in all) completed the Program for the Advancement of Leadership of Managers (PALM). Facilitated by Dr Idalynn Karre, PALM seminars were designed to build a community of leaders working together toward effective transformational leadership. Building this community was a necessary precursor for the conversations and decisions required for future governance project activities.

The eight, day-long, PALM seminars were held monthly during the 2012-13 academic year. Each seminar included readings, discussion, and skill development. Topics included: Understanding Self and Others, Work Behavioral Styles; Leading Effective Work Teams; Communication, Sources of Influence, and Emotional Intelligence; Managing Conflict Productively and Engaging in Crucial Conversation; Leading and Managing Change; Discovering and Applying Strengths in Leadership using the Clifton StrengthsFinder Survey; Leader as Manager; Hiring, Coaching, and Recognizing for Excellence; "Good to Great" Research Findings; Authentic Leadership.

Other accomplishments include:

- Senior leaders reviewed, revised and invited responses from the college community for many board of trustee's policies and procedures.
- A new form and process was created, piloted, and implemented for proposing a new academic program. The process ensures that new academic programs are approved by deans and the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) so that each area of the college supports the development of new programs and that new programs are included in the annual budgeting and planning processes.

2: Institution Involvement

A: PALM participants are key communicators and represent all divisions and areas of the college. PALM seminars included opportunities to apply the concepts and skills being learned to existing situations and projects.

Revised policies and procedures were emailed from a vice president or executive director to all college employees for feedback.

The new program proposal form was developed by a task force with SLT and curriculum committee members. It was vetted with deans and members from every academic department as well as the representatives of student development offices who participate in the curriculum committee.

3: Next Steps

A: During fall 2012, the college finalized and submitted its systems portfolio for HLC review. The Systems Appraisal Feedback (SAF) helped the college identify specific areas to target which include:

- Align decisions and financial planning with the mission and values, outcome assessment, and resources.
 - SAF, 1P3. "Although new courses and programs may be identified in many ways, there doesn't seem to be a structured way to determine their merit and connection to the mission of the institution. In the response, JJC identifies an opportunity to link program development to the strategic plan. Doing this may allow JJC to make better data driven decisions when prioritizing or choosing between new programs that compete for limited resources."
 - SAF, 5P5. "JJC recognizes the need to develop systematic processes to align decision-making within the institution that enables it to fulfill its mission. One of the charges of their AQIP project is to define the work of committees and to determine which committees will be standing committees that fit into the governance process. While responsible divisions for each committee are listed, it is unclear how overall committee membership is determined from evidence presented."
 - SAF, 5P6. "While JJC has accumulated sufficient data generated by both internal and external sources, it has the opportunity to incorporate this data in its strategic planning and decision making in a systematic manner."
 - SAF, 8P6. "JJC has an opportunity to develop a system aligning strategy selection, action plans, and financial planning with results from outcome assessments and resource gap analyses."
- Define processes (criteria and priorities) for annual allocation of resources.
 - SAF, 8P6. HLC Core Component 5.A. "It is unclear how resources are allocated to support current educational programs. While the Three-Year Financial Plan plays a role integrating the annual planning cycle with the college's Academic Quality Improvement Program and aligning the financial resources necessary with strategic planning objectives, the plan lacks clarity in its treatment of the first, perhaps foremost, strategic goal of the institution: to increase student success and completion. Included in this goal are priorities to improve data collection, provide orientation and advising to all students, develop a master schedule of courses, provide specialized transitional programs, and increasing technological resources. JJC does indicate that they are currently developing a process for aligning department plans to financial resources, which seems to be in process for an extended period of time. An opportunity attached to 8P4 in the 2009 Systems Portfolio, for instance, refers to a strategic planning process in need of linkages demonstrating how academic programs interface directly with students, faculty, and departments. Furthermore, the opportunity statement for 8R4 from that same Portfolio encourages JJC to improve its programmatic and departmental planning processes by helping employees to gain clarity between planning and actions, to understand how their work is guided by administrative processes, and to compare the institution's measures of effectiveness and performance to those tracked by many other higher education organizations. Taking

the current and recent Portfolios into account, it appears that JJC is unable to effectively provide substantive evidence of how it supports Core Component 5A, and immediate action can prevent escalation of this matter to a future level at which it can become an accreditation issue.”

- Develop processes to limit risks for projects.
 - SAF, 8P7. “JJC has a process where environmental scans are used to help identify changes in the external environment. There is no process described to limit risk in projects that move forward. JJC may want to develop a process where possible scenarios are developed, along with contingency plans for each possible scenario. Obviously JJC cannot predict and plan for every possible scenario, but planning for the most likely ones could help JJC plan for the future. While the College states that risk is taken into account during planning, there is no clear process described by which risk is identified, assessed and addressed.”
- Develop processes to link professional development to strategic plan and programmatic action plans.
 - SAF, 8P8. “There does not appear to be a process to ensure that professional development opportunities are taken, that the development is appropriate and timely, and that these opportunities are linked to the ongoing and changing needs of the institution. There does not appear to be a formal process to link these professional development opportunities to the strategic plan or Action Plans.”

4: Resulting Effective Practices

A: The College has realized that changing governance requires a change in the culture of the college, and in many college operations, procedure, customs, and understandings. While this realization may not be an effective practice, it is an essential step before change is possible.

5: Project Challenges

A: The work of this project was and continues to be affected by significant changes in the senior leadership team over the past two years; however, the new president is committed to developing a more effective governance structure.

Update Review

1: Project Accomplishments and Status

A: Joliet Junior College (JJC) has made some important progress in the past year. The College's SLT participated in a comprehensive leadership training program, began a process for evaluating college policies, and developed an improved form for new program proposals. The SLT's participation in the extended leadership training demonstrates the College's commitment to its people (AQIP Category 4) and models the people and leadership characteristics of high performance organizations. JJC should be able to use the PALM training to accomplish the action project goal of renewing and establishing an updated governance structure across the College.

2: Institution Involvement

A: A characteristic of high performance organizations is collaboration; a quality organization removes internal constraints that often exist because of the organization's structure. Building Collaborative Relationships (AQIP Category 9) is also an important component of a quality driven organization. JJC is creating processes that encourage widespread involvement by asking all college employees for feedback on proposed policy changes/new policies. JJC also had widespread involvement in the PALM training from 53 different administrators and professionals who represented various areas of the College. Widespread institutional involvement is critical for a governance change because it helps the institution understand stakeholder needs (AQIP Category 3).

3: Next Steps

A: Using feedback from its 2012 systems appraisal, JJC has identified a number of next steps for this project. Many of the steps identified through the System Portfolio Feedback report could fit with this action project. It will be important for the college to identify those steps that address the core focus of this action project – an improved governance structure – when submitting the final report

and closing this project.

High performance organizations have focus. Organizational structures and financial decisions are aligned with the overarching mission; this alignment is actualized through the organization's strategic plan. JJC might consider developing separate action projects that address some of the issues identified in the systems portfolio feedback report. For example, developing an action project that addresses risk management or professional development might enable JJC to develop a strategy to address those specific concerns.

In general, aligning decisions and financial allocations with strategic planning is related to an institution's governance structure.

4: Resulting Effective Practices

- A:** JJC recognizes that a governance change requires a culture change, and that making governance changes has implications for every area of college operations. JJC might be overlooking some of the other effective practices that have resulted from this action project. High performance organizations are "learning organizations" that develop a culture of continuous improvement and a commitment to developing people. JJC's commitment to developing leaders is an effective practice that has resulted from the action project, and it aligns with the AQIP principle of Valuing People (Category 4). Although it is difficult to quantify, JJC has also learned how to keep focus on an important goal during a time of substantial leadership changes.

5: Project Challenges

- A:** JJC has a realistic view of the challenges the College faces, especially in light of the leadership changes JJC has experienced. It might be helpful to take a step back to the original project goal (to establish a formalized governance structure) and the resulting changes JJC hopes to accomplish with this project. Has JJC made progress towards accomplishing this goal? How does the college know what progress has been made? How do the results of recent PACE surveys compare with results of PACE surveys conducted at the beginning of this project? JJC might consider breaking this project up into several smaller, more narrowly focused action projects based on what JJC has learned from this project. Overall, JJC has made good progress on this project; a remarkable accomplishment during a time of leadership uncertainty.