

<b>Action Project Worksheet</b>  <b>Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI</b>	<i>Challenging</i> _    _    x_    _    _ <i>Easy</i> <i>Simple</i> _    x_    _    _    _ <i>Complex</i> <i>High Payoff</i> _x    _    _    _    _ <i>Low</i>
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**Action Project Idea:** Define and deliver specific university-wide quality service standards and develop metrics which when used can lead to improved client-centered service to students, faculty and staff. Included would be the review and evaluation of divisional and departmental goals and policies to ensure that quality customer service is incorporated. Focusing on client-centered service will place students, their need for being valued as individuals and their learning at the center of our organization.

<b>AQIP Criterion in which this primarily relates:</b>	<b>Primary</b>	Understanding students' and other stakeholders' needs
	<b>Related</b>	Valuing people
	<b>Related</b>	Measuring effectiveness
	<b>Related</b>	Planning continuous improvement

**Briefly describe what you would like this Project to accomplish:**  
This project will define specific quality client-centered service standards to meet student, faculty, staff and other stakeholder expectations, establish service goals and develop a mechanism for measuring service effectiveness. Examples of service standards include, but are not limited to, providing accurate and complete information on our web pages; posting faculty office hours and ensuring faculty availability; defining response turn around times for email messages, student inquiries, and graduation audit processing.

The AQIP Project will serve as a pilot for the university and involve establishing and maintaining high standards for client-centered service in three-four selected units or departments across the university, along with measuring and managing service quality. The anticipated success of this project will allow the university to then implement the process on a broader scale across the university.

**Where did the idea or stimulus for this Action Project originate?**  
The idea for this Action Project originated at the Trailblazer Workshop on March 17, 2004. Workshop participants captured several needs under Category 3 that addressed student and stakeholder focus. The three top needs were: "systematic evaluation, formatting and scheduling of classes in terms of student needs – expand flexible office hours"; "need a formal complaint process...need to develop an integrated data-base to track complaints and monitor resolution"; "see students as true customers. Change the organization's culture to one of student's first. Listen more to student's concerns."

The University Constituent Services Committee, a cross university divisional team, has also identified quality service standards as a priority for university departments.

**Which specific needs of your students or other external stakeholders would be better met if you accomplished this Project? How?**  
Noel/Levitz Centers note that the provision of quality service to students on campus is a key element in attracting and retaining students today. This emphasis on service should be of paramount concern to colleges and universities nationwide. Some common customer service problems cited by Noel/Levitz are:

- Poor communication between offices and divisions.
- The "run-around" or "shuffle" from office to office.
- Staff hired and placed in positions with little regard for their personal strengths.
- Technology behind the times.
- Repeat the same mistakes semester after semester.
- Complicated fee payment procedures.
- Administrative policies and procedures designed for the convenience of the university instead of

the student.

- Little effort expended to “educate” the customer – students, parents, public.
- Employee and student stress at “peak times” such as registration.
- Complicated and untimely credit evaluations for transfer students.
- College services and hours do not match student needs.

Institutions concerned with delivering quality programs and services to students should be concerned with every aspect of the student’s experience on campus. And that means that attention must be paid to the quality of every interaction between a student and the institution’s representatives. Together, these “moments of truth” build or destroy the college’s image.

To serve the educational requests and expectations of our students requires protecting, learning and demanding real standards. This means that the education our students have paid for is provided and impediments to achieving this goal are removed throughout the university. Academic customer service means keeping the student at the center of the enterprise.

With the establishment of quality service standards, students and other external stakeholders would have a better understanding of what to expect when conducting business with the university and these standards would challenge service providers to improve the quality and cycle time of these services. Some examples of specific needs include: identifying the length of response time for grading assignments, answering appeals and student concerns, fulfilling transcript requests; improving response times for processing financial aid, admitting transfer students; preparing graduation audits; and improving class availability.

If we can serve students in a timely way and improve our communication to them, we will be more successful in retaining them.

Poor customer service causes colleges to lose 3% of their students during registration periods and another 12% during enrollment periods (Embrace the Oxymoron: Customer Service in Higher Education, by Neal Raisman, editor (2002)). Improving satisfaction of students enhances our ability to attract and retain those students as customers since they have option to go other places if needs aren’t met.

**How would doing this Project allow you to better meet your employees’ needs? Which, specifically?**

Employees need to understand what they will be held accountable for and what standards their performance will be measured against. By setting specific quality service standards, employees will be able to monitor and measure their success in meeting service expectations. This will alleviate role ambiguity and confusion and provide a better understanding of why processing deadlines are important. This project will further allow our employees to better serve not only their external constituents, but their internal customers as well.

**How would accomplishing this Project change or affect your institution’s culture?**

This project will help focus the needs on performance indicators which, in some units, may not be the primary focus. It will change our culture by giving quality client-centered service a greater prominence in business transactions with our university staff and faculty. Furthermore, It will show our constituents that service matters and that staff and faculty are held accountable for their interactions with students, parents and each other. We know that there is a direct correlation between good customer service and enrollment success. Those institutions that are student-centered and treat students as welcomed and respected constituents, while making sure they get a great education, will have enrollment and retention success. Students at EMU will know that they are being given the opportunity to learn, to succeed in their studies and meet their educational goals.

The University’s mission states that since 1849, EMU has been committed to the highest standards in the classroom, the community and the world. This AQIP Project will support the University in fulfilling its mission by identifying and reinforcing high quality standards across the university.

**What leadership and employee enthusiasm and support is there for doing this Project now?**

Since his arrival on campus in August 2004, Interim President Craig Willis has continually promoted

improving service to students (Eastern Michigan University Press Release, 11/01/04). He has made several staff organizational changes to better serve students and meet the changing needs of the university. There is strong support from the Academic Affairs division leadership and the AQIP team. Service EMU, a one-stop student service center, was opened in August 2004 to improve the provision of cross-divisional support services to students. In 2003, the Institutional Values Awards were introduced with a category for "continuous improvement, innovation and/or customer service." The Division of Student Affairs' Constituent Services Committee has been reactivated to focus on providing quality student services. In summary, there is a great deal of energy, enthusiasm and leadership support for developing comprehensive, university quality service standards for our students.