



Final Report

Marist College

PROJECT OVERVIEW

A. Description of the project, the underlying need and purposes

- The purpose of this project was to gather the scope and depth of our department's strengths and weaknesses. We needed to take a look at the inner workings of our organization and strengthen our services to our clients. We used the Baldrige guidelines' general questions outlined for each category in order to move the self-assessment process forward and we chunked those out five to eight questions at a time for the managers to answer with their team members. We then assigned the pieces to each group on a weekly basis for them to discuss and answer in the wiki tool within the online Sakai site.

B. Outline of the major project phases of the project and for each phase:

- The project has three main phases: Planning, Implementation, and Analysis.

- **Planning:**

In the planning phase, we made a timeline that covered the next two years and how that would look for our department while we conducted our self-study. We also answered the Baldrige guidelines questions and planned for the implementation of the project. Our main objective was to make our department better in its services and organization. The first part was involving all the employees and to disseminate the information properly from the managers to their staff. This took place at the face to face meetings held on a weekly basis. The second part of the information flow was for the managers to meet with their staff and answer the guideline questions using the wiki tool in the Sakai site. This work flow for the project worked in keeping the majority of employees informed and able to participate in the process and feedback loop. Each department within Information Technology was asked to answer and reflect upon these questions which helped to build upon the base knowledge and the power of the exercise. These assignments had due dates and guidelines for the departments to follow in order to keep a form of standardization. The questions were answered using the wiki in the online site that was created.

After each assignment was completed and reflected upon by each department, each manager was asked to do a short presentation at one of the face to face meetings on a monthly schedule. Each presentation was structured around what



questions were answered, how they were answered, and what was learned during the process. See Figure 2 The presentations were archived and notes were taken of each meeting in a blog tool within the online Sakai site. This enabled the progression of the process to be documented in a relatively real time manner.

○ **Implementation:**

The main part of our implementation focused around the use of a Sakai online project site to which all participants had access. The tool we used the most heavily was the wiki, an online program that allows a number of Web pages to be accessed by Internet users and modified. Through the use of a wiki we were able to work together asynchronously as well as have the CIO comment on the process in real time. We also used several other tools in the site to orchestrate the project such as the Resources (documents storage), blogger tool (online journal), and the podcast tool. All of these tools plus, the special nature of this project enabled a synchronous and asynchronous environment for the project growth.

The use of Sakai tools enabled both open communication and collaboration across the entire information technology department. Communication and group collaboration is essential in any self-study. There is a real need to have authentic assessment and discussions about each of the questions, themes, and standards that are covered in the study. In order to have a complete self-study, all stakeholders need to have a say in the process.

○ **Analysis:**

The entire project has been directed toward improving services. This is the stage that we are currently working on for our self-study. We are implementing our improvement plans and gathering data from these activities. We have yet to analyze the outcomes thoroughly.

C. Progress report noting specific accomplishments attained to date, tasks/activities yet to be completed with projected timetable

a. Accomplishments to date:

- Focus Groups
- Analysis of services and organization
- Relationships between departments have strengthened

b. Tasks to be completed:

- Implementation of improvement plans
- Follow through with focus group suggestions
- Presentation of self-study findings
- Preparation for Middle States Accreditation visit



D. Description of the ways in which the Baldrige/EHE framework was used in planning, assessment and leadership at various stages in your project.

We planned every part of our self-study using the EHE standards and the Baldrige guidelines. We used these tools to structure the project and stuck closely to them throughout. We weaved the Baldrige criteria throughout the project and saw to it that we never lost sight of the true nature of the project, self-study.

E. Observations on the value the Baldrige/EHE framework for your project

We never would have been able to conduct our self-study without the guidelines of the EHE and Baldrige. We needed consistent, reliable guidelines to keep our self-study on course. The use of the Baldrige guidelines and the EHE standards helped us move the project along at a steady speed. The question provided by Baldrige allowed for reflection and real feedback between the departments as well as between the CIO and the department.

After working through this process, we can share some lessons learned that may help other institutions that are considering an effort such as this. First, it is important to create a timeline but remain flexible and realistic. You need to view this as a process as well as a project. We have slid deadlines a few times because the group needed us to clarify, give different examples, define the framework or simply review the information again. It is more important to have a group understanding rather than just meeting a deadline, particularly since each phase builds on the previous.

Second, encourage feedback and accept it when it comes. Just as you would in a continuous improvement process, take the output from the participants and modify how or what your present approach might be. Through the feedback we received, we slowed the process down, we reframed material, and we reviewed material with our CIO, our HR department and our Vice-President for Institutional Research. We even brought in experts. We took great care to listen and respond quickly.

You also want to make sure the entire department is participating. In an effort to shield some employees from extra work, managers may not be involving all levels of the organization. Find this out early by talking with employees and ensure that the entire organization has an opportunity to be involved.

Third, always keep the end goal in mind, which is strategic and operational planning. You will find that participants, especially early on, may have difficulty integrating this process into their normal routine. Especially, if particular employees have not previously been involved in the planning process, it is essential to the project's success that you keep them focused. Talk about the college's strategic goals. Help them bridge those goals to their specific planning so that they see clearly how their contribution impacts the college's strategic plan and goals.



Finally, be consistent in your delivery. Decide ahead of time how information will be presented, disseminated, and reviewed. Although you may modify this as you receive feedback from participants, you want to continue to move the project forward by being consistent and persistent. Along that same thought, if you are learning the process along with your participants, try to stay at least two steps ahead of them. Review the upcoming material. Identify if you need to alter your schedule because a section is a particularly detailed one. In short, be organized and prepared.



VALUE/USE OF EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION/BALDRIGE METHODOLOGY

- Leadership

In what ways did senior leaders at your organization play a role in the development and implementation of your project? How important is/was leadership support to the project's progress and outcomes?

We had the backing of key stakeholders such as the Chief Information Officer and all of the Directors of the different departments within Information Technology, from the very beginning of our project. We explained the process, the steps we intended to take, the tools we intended to use, and the outcomes we expected before we even started the project. This gave us a clear path to follow with all of the employees.

- Strategic Planning

In what ways was planning critical to success of your project? How important was having a well-articulated plan, including a clear sense of purpose, a shared view of the vision of the completed project, and clear goals?

Without successfully planning our project, we never would be able to accomplish this project or to continue the momentum for it. We spent at least a month or so planning out the steps we would take for the project and in what order we would present the given information and details of the projects. The planning was extremely detailed and went as far as to figure out how long it would take for each Baldrige category to be covered on a weekly basis. We have a timeline that covers a two year plus window. The hardest part has been sharing the ongoing vision of the project with all of the employees. Until we brought in the Teaching and Learning component of the process into the project, the majority of employees (mostly those who supervised student employees) were wondering what they could get out of the project besides more paperwork. We pointed out how they were helping the student body at large as well as the students directly under their supervision.

This marked a key turn in the manner in which most of the employees approached the project. This is the moment in the project when the vision of the project became more cohesive for all involved. This type of planning enables employees to directly impact the decision making, planning and implementation process of their individual and umbrella department. Information is key to effective decision making. The quality and consistency of the information our employees now provide to management is an indirect contribution to the decision making process. They don't have to be in the room during a



decision because their information is already present. This has led to a better understanding of one's job, others' jobs, and our roles in the department and the college as whole.

- Beneficiaries and Constituents

How did you engage constituents in the design and/or implementation of your project? What mechanisms did you use to gather feedback from the constituents affected by your project? What was the impact of stakeholder engagement in your project?

We held extensive focus groups with our constituents and beneficiaries. We asked for honest feedback involving the services they received from the Information technology department. We also have a random survey generated by the help desk upon the resolution of a problem. The focus groups were highly successful due to the ability to ask the questions we really didn't want the answers to, such as what could we do better, what weren't we doing to make our clients happy?, Etc. These are the tough questions that we asked that we kind of cringed from really knowing the answer. It actually came out in our favor as we learned a lot about our department that we either had never either thought of or did not realize. The main revelation was the perceived identity of the Information Technology on campus. We took the information and used/are using the information to re-package some services as well as to create new services that are essential to our department and our constituents.

- Programs and Services

What programs and/or services were the focus of your effort? Why was this/these particular programs/services selected? In what ways were these programs and services critical to your organization?

We were completely open throughout this process. All of our services were open to scrutiny. We wanted to know how everything that we were doing was affecting each part of the system of the department. It was an all-inclusive study as our department is responsible for all of the Information Technology needs on campus. It was a bit overwhelming but since we are divided into sub-departments within the overarching Information Technology department, we were able to handle all of the input. Improvement plans that directly address constituents' concerns and have a positive impact on teaching and learning have been implemented.



- Faculty/Staff and Workplace

In what ways did your project support a workplace culture that encourages, recognizes and rewards excellence, accountability, assessment, innovation, and/or professional development? In what ways were campus and department culture and/or climate important factors in the process and outcomes of your project.

The project included the use of online tools that made it possible for the accountability of each employee as well as the interactive capability that a self-study can sometimes lack. Due to the manner the information was disseminated, live face to face meetings, the self-study became a part of the culture of our department. It is now engrained in many, if not all, of our processes we currently use/are using.

- Assessment and Information Use

How did you measure, analyze, and review your outcomes and achievements? How did you develop the measures? In ways do you believe this initiative will contribute to building a commitment to sustained assessment and accountability?

It took a lot of collaboration to come up with the proper metrics for the different categories of the self-study. There was a quite a bit of discussion and compromising that had to take place in order to have the proper metrics in place. Some are still being worked on so that they can properly gather the appropriate information. We have gained a deeper understanding of our department as a whole by examining where our collective opportunities for improvement exist and how we are each responding to the opportunity. It is very easy to get swept up in our individually, driven work. However, this project forced us to take a broader view of our work.

- Outcomes and Achievements

In quantitative and qualitative form, what were your outcomes and/or achievements? How are these results being used for continuing review and improvement?

As with any new process, we expected certain outcomes. These included increased customer awareness, improved and expanded services, and a plan for continuous improvement for Information Technology overall as well as each individual department. Since an entire section is devoted to beneficiaries and constituencies, this process intrinsically creates customer awareness. During this section we evaluated the effectiveness of our services based not only on past survey data, we also conducted focus groups which allowed us to directly interact with our customers. We then used this data



to highlight strengths and develop goals and plans for areas of weakness. The entire project has been directed toward improving services. Some of the improved and expanded services include creating a presence in each academic building to support our professors teaching on line, developing a plan to enlarge and relocate our digital publication center so that services can be expanded, and providing documentation onsite for students and faculty using higher end equipment in our computer labs. The results we have uncovered so far are being used in our ongoing strategic planning process for our department.

INSIGHTS/LESSONS LEARNED

What were the **three** most important lessons your institution learned from using the Excellence in Higher Education/Baldrige framework and/or methodology to design and implement this project that you believe could make a difference for other institutions undertake a similar project or change effort?

1. Planning (strategic and operational) always as the underlining goal/focus
2. Constant feedback between participants as well as between the key stakeholders and the participants is important. Strong communication keeps the project alive for everyone.
3. Timeline needs to be made well in advanced and be flexible but realistic