

LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE TEAM PROJECT

PROJECT TITLE:

WHY ARE SO MANY TEXTBOOKS UNAVAILABLE FOR STUDENTS AT THE START OF THE SEMESTER AT COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF PHILADELPHIA?

TEAM MEMBERS:

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OVERVIEW

The mission of Community College of Philadelphia is to provide access to higher education to all residents of Philadelphia. The college appears to be faced with the dilemma of many unavailable textbooks at the start of the semester. This research project was undertaken to identify the reasons/causes for the unavailability of textbooks and its effect on student engagement and persistence.

The primary sources of our information were: interviews, faculty surveys, and student surveys which provided critical data.

The goals of the team were to collect, analyze, and report information to assist in the decision-making process of resolving this dilemma.

Prior to undertaking this endeavor, the team members hypothesized that the causes of the unavailability of textbooks at the start of the semester were:

1. The lack of a formal textbook ordering process for the faculty of Community College of Philadelphia
2. Unreasonable deadlines for ordering textbooks
3. Miscommunication between the bookstore and the faculty
4. Inconsistent ordering procedures
5. Financial barriers for students

Studying the process currently in existence, and by interviewing and surveying a sampling of those involved, were thought to be helpful in identifying any deficiencies. Incorporating the findings and developing a new or revised process will produce an increase in student engagement and persistence at the college.

CONCLUSIONS

The research revealed that the unavailability of textbooks at the beginning of the semester is not as widespread as previously presumed. Therefore, the cost to the college

is minimal (few students withdrawing due to textbooks issues) and the impact on student engagement and persistence appears to be minor. However, one of the purposes of this study was to determine why all textbooks are not available at the beginning of the semester. The data proved that the current process does create problems for students, faculty, and the bookstore. The interviews disclosed the opinion that the bookstore does a satisfactory job in delivering textbooks on time. The faculty survey revealed a slight dissatisfaction with textbook delivery. Although, most surveyed faculty reported that their books were available prior to the beginning of the Fall 2003 semester they have experienced textbook problems at some time. The student survey revealed similar opinions of a slight dissatisfaction. The team members conclude that even though this problem is not as vast as previously thought; improvements in the process are desperately needed. The major problems revealed in this study are: (1) the lack of a formal process for ordering textbooks, (2) and poor communication between the bookstore, Department Heads, and faculty.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In an effort to respond to the question, how can the process be improved to assure the availability of textbooks for all students prior to or at the start of the semester? The following recommendations are made:

1. Establish a Bookstore Advisory Committee consisting of: Faculty, Staff, Administrators, and the Bookstore Manager.
Initiatives:
 - to establish a consistent book-ordering process at the main campus and regional centers
 - communicate the process to all faculty members
 - monitor/assess the process over time
2. Plan a “Book-order Day”.
3. Bookstore Manager to attend a Department Heads meeting once a semester.
4. Formalize the textbook ordering process.
 - a. A formal ordering process must be created and communicated to all parties involved. Many variables have to be considered when creating this process. For example, what is a reasonable timeframe for placing orders? And, who is responsible for meeting deadlines? Department Heads should be responsible for identifying a point person for this process.
5. Incorporate more technology in process.
6. Identify one person per department to compile and submit book orders.

NEXT STEPS – LONG-TERM PROJECT

1. Meet with the Vice President, Academic Affairs
2. Meet with Department Heads
3. Serve as members of the Bookstore Advisory Committee
4. Assess the effectiveness of changes

Kathleen Mulray

The Leadership Institute and the team project provided the opportunity to interact with colleagues from different areas within the college and create new friendships. The Institute sessions inspired interesting and enlightening discussions dealing with leadership in higher education. In fact, many of the concepts that were discussed were found to be very useful when executing our group project.

Specifically through the project, I learned a greater appreciation for teamwork, interdependence, and problem-solving/research techniques. Our group was very aware of the value of effective communication and the importance of our individual roles. We practiced group decision-making throughout the entire process. We combined our different skills, characteristics, and leadership styles and successfully performed our task.

We concluded that the major problems with textbook availability are the lack of a formal process for ordering textbooks and poor communication between the bookstore, Department Heads, and faculty.

In addition, I learned that our colleagues genuinely care about the success of our students. And, the wisdom and experience of your mentor is invaluable.

Roger Garbett

The Leadership Institute and the team project was an experience that I will never forget. Prior to being apart of the Leadership Institute, I had never interacted with people from so many different departments learning and working on projects together. A certain kind of bonding took place among the groups. Friendships were born. A higher sense of networking was cultivated and refined. And personally, I feel that my colleagues have begun to recognize me as someone more then the air-conditioning guy from plant department.

The book store project was something real special. I got to work with three of the best people ever. We had fun and learned a great deal as we did the project. Above all, some figures have surfaced that indicate that the project did have an impact on the process by which books are ordered and made available for students at the beginning of the semester. It was truly wonderful to be on such a great team.

The Leadership Institute is an experience that many should to their learning experience as well as their resumes. Community College of Philadelphia is buzzing about the Leadership Institute and rightfully so, it an enormous learning opportunity.

John Pinto

What I learned from this project is really two-fold. First, I learned the art of cooperation and compromise. It's no easy task to have four completely different individuals working on one project. Coming to an agreement on what the topic should be and deciding how to

accomplish it was challenging. There was a lot of give and take and listening. I put my own agenda aside, and I listened to what the other members of my group had to say. It wasn't necessary for me to control what was happening. My partners not only had valuable things to contribute, but also what they had to contribute often made more sense than what I was trying to say.

The second thing I learned was about the topic itself. Being a faculty member for almost 27 years, I have heard horror stories about the inefficiency of the bookstore. I learned that there are problems, but most of them seem to fall outside of the bookstore's control. Faculty members are not aware of the ordering process (60%), so they get their orders in late. Another thing I discovered is that the unavailability of books is not as pervasive as I thought. Yes, some students do not have their textbooks available at the beginning of the semester, but most do. Also, the impact of not having books was not as great as I thought. For example, students did say that it was a problem, but the severity of the problem was never determined. What I did learn was that only a very small number of students (5%) withdrew from a course because of the unavailability of textbooks at the start of the semester. Even financial did not play a significant role. Only 30% said it hindered them in purchasing books.

Yes, problems occur, but they seem to be sporadic. I feel that better communication between the bookstore and departments will improve the process.