Community College of Philadelphia
Leadership Institute
2007-2008

Project Final Report

1. Project title & team members' names.

CCPfaqs (Frequently Asked Questions) web site.

Team Members:
Sandra Gonzalez-Torres, Associate Director for Act Now/Act 101
Jennifer Sheppard, Acting Coordinator of Grants in the Office of Institutional Advancement
Tanya Stewart-Austin, Budget and Financial Analyst in the Office of Finance and Planning
Aerie Webb, Assistant Professor of English

Mentor: Dr. Samuel Hirsch, Vice President for Student Affairs

2. An overview of the project proposal/goals.

Proposal Summary:
Given that:
*   the College has no standardized format for "Frequently Asked Questions" (FAQs), and
*   the FAQs that do exist are difficult to find when navigating the MyCCP portal or the College's web site,

We propose to:
*   compile and standardize existing FAQs,
*   establish an easily accessible location for FAQs to be posted on the MyCCP portal and/or the College's homepage, and
*   develop a style guide for departments to follow when creating future FAQs.

Rationale:
A centralized location for standardized FAQs will enable students, staff, and faculty to easily find answers to common questions about Admissions, Financial Aid, Advising, Counseling, Records and Registrations, and Student Life. This will greatly decrease confusion and dissatisfaction with the College overall.

3. An explanation of how the project relates to this year's theme of "Fostering Student Engagement and Persistence."

Students are more persistent when they feel empowered, and they are more fully engaged when they feel that faculty, staff, and administrators are genuinely invested in their success. But when our students can't figure out how to get the answers they need as they try to understand and follow college policy, they may feel frustrated and disempowered. If they then approach faculty, staff, and administrators who are unable to help, that frustration may be compounded; nothing will have altered their conviction that the institution doesn't care, and they may become less engaged and less likely to persist.

It is our shared mission to help our students get the answers they need. Currently, the answers to pertinent questions regarding course registration, financial aid, and many other areas relating to college policy are spread out across a wide range of web sites and online documents. While most of the information the students need is available online, it can be hard to find and difficult to understand without expertise in a particular area or department. With the hope of doing better for our students, we are creating the CCPfaqs web site, a centralized location for simple, easy-to-read, standardized frequently asked questions, which will enable all of us to quickly and easily help our students find answers. Students will then see that we are eager and able to help them, and they will be able to find the answers for themselves.

4. A summary of research undertaken in the completion of the project.

Our research began when Betty Cannon, Student Systems Technical Analyst, expressed the need for a centralized location for all of CCP's frequently asked questions. She shared with us a list of FAQs based on student telephone calls to the Help Desk. We then conducted a study of the FAQ pages of local universities. Our study revealed that FAQ pages are not easy to find, often located several clicks from the universities' home pages. Also, they largely use the traditional FAQ-page format of a single web page, listing questions at the top and then bumping users further down the page to find the answers. Drexel University's FAQ page, however, allows "Google-like" queries in which a user types in a question. A "search engine" then yields answers based on keywords. This closely mirrored our vision of how an FAQ web site could work at CCP. Next, we met with David Watters, Acting Dean of Student Life, to learn more about the MyCCP portal. The MyCCP portal was the logical place for the FAQs to be centralized, and David wholeheartedly agreed. David explained that we would need a channel within the portal and suggested that we also have a channel on the portal log-in page.

Once we were clear about what we wanted, we set out to create it. First, we were invited to meet with Jody Bauer, Chief Information Officer, and SK Calkins, SCT Banner Project Manager, to discuss how to create the FAQ page. At this meeting, we were informed that free code could be taken from Google and applied to a traditional FAQ page. We were advised not to use Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), and it was suggested we contact Don Friel, Assistant Professor of Instructional Technology and Design Specialist for Academic Computing, to have his CIS 130 students create the page for us as an assignment. We then met with Don, who gave us a crash course in CSS. Since we were advised not to use CSS, he reckoned, we might as well create the web page in MS Word and convert it into HTML from there. After conversations with

our Leadership Institute colleagues, however, we realized that MS Word would not be suitable. While we were momentarily daunted by our unfamiliarity with web development technology and our inability to create what we wanted ourselves, our unfamiliarity proved to be our greatest creative asset because it kept us asking questions and moving forward instead of settling for less than what we had envisioned.

Next, we met with Matthew Shupp, Acting Director of Student Life, to discuss using Student Life's FAQs and having the Office of Student Life "house" our project upon its completion. As the meeting progressed, we shared with him our frustration with the creation of our FAQ page. He informed us that Student Life does not use MS Word to create their web page, and instead uses the software *Dreamweaver*. He not only educated us about what the software does; he also offered to have his work study student create our FAQ search page using this software. We set up a meeting with Matthew and his work study student, Shaheer Franklin, but in the meantime, we met with an Information Technology consultant who introduced us to the miracle of knowledge-based applications. A knowledge-based application is a system where data collected using a program called My SQL is connected to a search engine that can instantaneously find the data queried. The IT consultant created an application that matched our vision perfectly, and we christened our project CCPfaqs. He taught us how to populate the database with questions, and he modified the application according to our specifications. In addition, he created user names and passwords for every department on campus so that they can populate the application with their frequently asked questions should they choose. At our meeting with Matthew and Shaheer, Shaheer explained how he could create a web page in *Dreamweaver* to act as the "front end" of this application. The "front end" would serve as the home page with which students would interface. Finally, we again met with Jody and also with

Bill Bromley, Technical Support Services Manager. They assured us that our project could easily be uploaded to CCP's server.

5. An outline of steps taken to complete the project.

- Met with Betty Cannon, Student Systems Technical Analyst, who introduced the concept and need for a centralized location for frequently asked questions at CCP; enlisted her assistance and received a compiled list of FAQs based on student calls received by the Help Desk.

- Researched FAQs posted on other community college and university web sites including Drexel University and Temple University.

- Researched currently existing FAQs from appropriate CCP departments to determine what is currently posted on the CCP web site.

- Met with Dr. Samuel Hirsch, Vice President of Student Affairs and team mentor, to discuss project, receive feedback, and gain advice.

- Created and presented a PowerPoint slide show at the January 11, 2008 Leadership Institute Presentation (open to the College community) to illustrate the need for our project and the ease with which a centralized FAQs web site could be established.

- Met with David Watters, Acting Dean of Students, to discuss parameters of using the College's MyCCP portal system and the existing Student Life FAQs.

- Met with Debbie Allen, Director of Student Records and Registration, Luke Kasim, Director of Admissions and Kimberly Tayor-Benns, Financial Aid Operations Manager, to discuss the FAQs project and secure their department's participation; asked each representative to send us a list of FAQs.

- Developed the first draft of the FAQs style guide which CCP offices will use to follow standards of readability, grammar, and formatting as they write their questions and answers.

- Met with Jody Bauer, Chief Information Officer, and SK Calkins, SCT Banner Project Manager, to discuss IT's support of our FAQs project.

- Began editing FAQs received from the Offices of Student Records and Registration, Admissions, and Financial Aid into a common style and format; a second draft of the FAQs style guide was developed using the information learned from this editing process.

- Discussed technology options in the creation and development of the CCPfaqs web site with Don Friel, Assistant Professor of Instructional Technology and Design Specialist for

Academic Computing, Matthew Shupp, Acting Director of Student Life, and members of the Leadership Institute.

- Worked with an IT consultant to develop "back end" of CCPfaqs web site.
- Met with David Watters, Acting Dean of Students, and Dr. Samuel Hirsch, Vice President of Student Life and our CCPfaqs Mentor, to update them on the progress of the project.
- Met with a CCP student worker to develop "front end" of CCPfaqs web site.
- Met with Jodi Bauer, Chief Information Officer and Bill Bromley, Manager, Technical Support Services, to show them the CCPfaqs web site and confirm their support for uploading this web site on to the MyCCP portal system.

6. For short-term projects, if now completed, an overview of how they turned out.

   Not applicable.

7. For long-term projects, an outline of next steps and long-term goals.

   - Finalize template questions.

   - Discuss the possibility of creating a list of key words for the search page.

   - Create instructions for offices and department explaining how to upload questions and answers on the back end administration page.

   - Finalize "back end" (administration page) where offices and departments will be able to add and edit the FAQs.

   - Upload and finalize the look of the "front end" (the search page) of our CCPfaqs web site. Also add a feature so that students can e-mail different departments if they have unanswered questions.

   - Finalize revisions of the FAQs from Records and Registration, Financial Aid, and Admissions.

   - Meet with these departments for approval of our edits.

   - Give CCP's IT department the code to upload our CCPfaqs web site to the College server.

   - Cut and paste questions and answers from Records and Registration, Financial Aid and Admissions into the new CCPfaqs web site once IT has uploaded it onto the server.

   - Meet with focus groups (students, faculty, staff, and administrators) to assess the ease and success of the CCPfaqs web site.

   - Revise CCPfaqs web site and CCPfaqs Style Guide in response to feedback.

   - Over the summer, meet with other departments and offices to encourage them to create their own frequently asked questions and answers to add to the CCPfaqs web site.

   - Demonstrate the CCPfaqs web site during Professional Development week to enlist the participation of more departments.

   - Market and advertise the CCPfaqs web site to students after we have enough FAQs from CCP offices and departments.

8. An overview of how the project has been or may be institutionalized within the College for continuity.

   Our FAQ project should be institutionalized within the College for continuity because the project will decrease confusion and dissatisfaction among CCP students, staff, faculty, and administrators. One of the major dissatisfactions that students have with the College is trying to get their questions answered regarding financial aid, registration deadlines, and other pertinent information. Our CCPfaqs web site will be featured on the MyCCP portal login page and have its own channel within the MyCCP portal. Featuring the CCPfaqs web site on the portal will provide prospective and current students with answers to their questions in a quickly and easily accessible centralized location. If a student does not find an answer to his or her question, the CCPfaqs web site will direct the student to the MyCCP Support Request Form.

   Thus far, feedback has suggested that our project is valuable and should be implemented institution wide:

- This is a great project that will be highly beneficial for new and current students. Perhaps it can be included in the prospective student portal as well. (Luke Kasim)

- Very much needed to help not only the students but also to help others help the students!

- This will be extremely beneficial for students. Many students are very frustrated trying to find information on How to, Where is, and Who on campus for all departments.

- I think this is a great idea. I'm glad you showed the link to the SLC web site! Obviously there have been attempts in the past to "pull information together" that already exists. I'm glad this is a vehicle that could get it done. Also, I think this would greatly assist with the online NSO (new student orientation) that is rolling out. I'd love to follow up with all of you on how this FAQ could assist with these initiatives. Great job! (Matthew Shupp)

- Great idea to create the template for the FAQs for consistency and style; portal requires links to web-viewable documents (pages, pdfs, etc.) (David Watters)

9.   Assessment results or plans for assessment.

   Thus far, assessment of the evolving project has been informal feedback from colleagues

and our mentor. This feedback has yielded useful modifications, including a specific template

for creating questions and a link to a PDF version of the CCPfaqs Style Guide. As we continue

with the project, we will elicit feedback from students, staff, faculty, and administrators. Formal

assessment includes convening focus groups, distributing surveys, and adding a web counter to

the CCPfaqs "front end." Informal assessment, including anecdotal and word-of-mouth

feedback, will be ongoing.

10. A summary (from each individual) of what you learned by doing the project and how it impacted you as a leader.

Sandra Gonzalez-Torres
Associate Director for Act Now/Act 101

I always appreciate further professional development experiences and I had hoped that participating in the Leadership Institute would teach me more about the institutional processes of the Community College of Philadelphia. It has, and much more…

I am grateful for the relationships I have developed with the ten Leadership Institute participants, the facilitators and of course, my team. It is these relationships that have allowed me to broaden my perspectives on how the College works and how leading is really all about relationships.

The Leadership Institute's team project has allowed me to work with some amazing women. The more I learned about my own leadership style, the better I was able to seek support from this group. Each of these ladies is smart, creative and committed to the mission of the College. Their dedication to our project made working with them an amazing experience. I appreciate the fact that as we found challenges, our team became more devoted to the project and its success.

Of course, leadership is also about applicability. I look forward to continuing the work we have begun, and to the day when everyone on campus will use the CCPfaqs when they have a quick question!

Jennifer Sheppard
Acting Coordinator of Grants in the Office of Institutional Advancement

I have learned a great deal about technology and the inner workings of the College from this project. I now have a much better understanding of the different departments that make up the College's diverse parts, which has, of course, increased my understanding of the College as a whole. Additionally, this project has impacted me as a leader by increasing my tolerance for uncertainty and my patience with processes; improving my collaboration and cooperation skills; and reaffirming my belief that effective leadership has much more to do with flexibility than it does with control. This project has been an excellent opportunity to learn and to grow, and I am proud to be a part of the CCPfaqs team.

Tanya Stewart-Austin
Budget and Financial Analyst in the Office of Finance and Planning

First and foremost, I would like to thank the Leadership Institute for giving me the opportunity to be a participant in this year's class. I know that had I not participated in the LI that I may not have been awarded the opportunity to interact with the other participants, LI facilitators or presenters. Everyone that I came into contact with over this journey has given me some insight on how to become an effective leader. It has been a pleasure working with my team and I believe that as my team continues to work on our project, we will continue to grow and become more aware of our leadership abilities as a result of participating in the LI.

One of the most important things that I have learned from my work on the LI project so far is to be conscious of the effects that any given project may have on the College as a whole. When we were in the planning stages of our project, we did not think of the consequences that the project could have on the College. For example, our first idea involved students participating in an online format. Initially, we did not consider the legal ramifications that an online format could bring about for the college. Being conscious of how a project may affect the College has been beneficial because it changes one's understanding of why some things that may seem like good projects or policies cannot be instituted in the College.

The project has also impacted me as a leader because the experience has shown me the importance of being a team player. The process has revealed that a leader must also have the ability to work within a team. There are times when a leader must lead and there are times when a leader must work as a team member. In addition, I have learned from this experience that a leader must be open-minded. A leader has to share his or her vision and listen to what others have to contribute to the vision.

As a result of participating in the LI, I believe that I can better maintain an open mind when exploring the ongoing changes that the College is, and will continue, to undergo. I believe that this experience has given me the tools that are required to contribute to the College's growth in sustaining its integrity and mission in correlation with the rapid changes in the educational environment.

Aerie Webb
Assistant Professor of English

Before I participated in the Leadership Institute of 2007-2008, I knew quite a bit about the students and faculty at CCP. But I didn't know anything about anybody else. I applied to the Institute because I wanted to see how the rest of the college works and how people make things happen. And just as I had hoped, imagining, creating, and implementing the CCPfaqs has been enlightening in this respect. Working with my team, as well as colleagues in a range of offices school-wide, has made it more than obvious how each area and department is integral to the success of other areas and departments. I have also been able to get a sense of what those other areas and departments are up against as they complete their part. But what has changed is not only the fact that I now have a sense of the bigger picture. More specifically, I now feel and know that I have colleagues in offices and departments across the school who have the same mission as I do; they want our students to succeed. For this reason and others, working on our project has been both humbling and emboldening. I have discovered that to make things happen, I need to take risks and trust in our common mission.

Put another way, ruminating on my own private vision for the school is nice, but it means nothing until it becomes a shared vision. But learning this—in the context of our group project—took some adjustment. Initially I was disappointed, not with the group experience, but with the project we tackled. I had had other ideas to which I had become attached, primarily because in my head, those ideas continued to resonate with our theme of student engagement, and I couldn't let go of what might have been. But it was also becoming clear to me that the project we did develop would address our theme as well—albeit in a more practical and less "visionary" way—and visionary or not, the practical benefit to students (and to myself as a faculty member trying to help students) became an attraction I couldn't deny. In fact, I started to

realize that the difference between my "vision" and the project we had settled on, was the difference between a "possibly good thing" and "an absolute necessity." I stopped dreaming about what might have been and started to understand the success of our project as crucial to our students. Our shared vision became my own.

I also learned to do things fast—or at least faster than I would have. My mode of operating (as a writer in any context) has always been to spend a long time writing and rewriting until I have a product I'm happy with no matter how many times I read it. But the writing and planning we did for this project served a different function, and I wasn't used to that. I had to let go of that control and trust that what we had done would serve its purpose, and any other stake I had (in one word over another) had to be side-lined as simply not relevant.

More important, I learned that ideas can be put into practice at CCP, and this has emboldened me to think about how to pursue some of the other ideas I've had. I started thinking about this because in the course of completing our project, I discovered that the people who know how to do things I don't know how to do can actually be found, and not only can they be found; they are willing to listen. Certainly we would never have been able to get our project off the ground if this were not the case. My point is that I have all sorts of areas of in-expertise which have intimidated me in the past because I knew that alone, I would never be able to accomplish what I had imagined. But since I now know people in these different departments, I can approach people for help whether I'm trying to help my students in-the-moment or in a more long-term kind of way—which means that I, along with others, can get things done.

As a leader I have discovered I have potential because of my desire to see certain things happen. My skills as a leader would probably relate to my willingness to identify with visions larger than my own while continuing to advocate for the changes I imagine. I have been

emboldened by this experience because I have realized that to make change happen, I will have to leave the imaginary land of "perfection"—where I never say a wrong thing or write an imperfect phrase—behind. I will need to take risks, prioritize, and trust that our shared vision will lead us to those skills we need as we engage our students and they persist in achieving their goals.

Acknowledgements

The CCPfaqs team would like to thank the following people for their active support and participation as we tackled our project this year. We look forward to continued collaborations as we finalize the CCPfaqs web site.

Dr. Samuel Hirsch, Vice President of Student Life and our CCPfaqs Team Mentor

Mr. David Watters, Acting Dean of Students

Ms. Jody Bauer, Chief Information Officer

Dr. Matthew Shupp, Acting Director of Student Life

Mr. Shaheer Franklin, Work Study student, Office of Student Life

The Offices of Admissions, Financial Aid and Student Records and Registration:

Mr. Luke Kasim, Director of Admissions

Ms. Kimberly Tayor-Benns, Financial Aid Operations Manager

Ms. Debbie Allen, Director of Student Records and Registration

The 2007-2008 Leadership Institute Facilitators:

Mr. Peter Barratta, Assistant to the Dean, Math, Science and Health Careers Division

Mr. Brian Seymour, Chair of the Art History Department

Dr. Susan Tobia, Executive Assistant to the Vice President for Academic Affairs

And of course to all of our 2007-2008 Leadership Institute co-participants!

Thank you!

Aerie, Jen, Sandra and Tanya