Top Five Lessons Learned
Concordia University
4/21/10

Lesson One:
Our AQIP Steering Committee is more effective with members from various colleges and units of the university.

The membership of the AQIP Steering Committee is composed of faculty, staff, and administrators from various colleges and service units, some who have been at CUC for a many years and others that are new to the institution. The members bring varying perspectives to the discussion and are able to communicate the work of the committee to different areas of the institution. As the committee worked to prepare the second Systems Portfolio for the university, the varied membership contributed valuable data, observations, and results as they applied to the different categories. Ultimately, this helped produce a better reflection of Concordia University in our second portfolio.

Lesson Two:
Although the distinctive objectives of CUC remain our greatest strength as an institution, the evaluation of processes and performance results for these objectives is still one of our greatest challenges.

In developing the first Systems Portfolio for the university, we saw that we needed to consistently collect relevant data. In updating the portfolio, we found that we collect much data but that we are not always systematically analyzing the data, using the data to make decisions, communicating the decisions to the community, and evaluating the effectiveness of the decisions. This is most evident in Category Two, “Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives.” What sets us apart from other institutions (our distinctive objectives) is still our strength but we continue to struggle to develop effective processes to evaluate our performance results, for this category. Our mission is our foundation and all units of the university continue to develop activities to successfully carry out our mission (distinctive objectives), yet we have not been able to develop an effective approach for evaluating our performance in this area.

Lesson Three:
Building accountability into the system of continuous improvement is crucial.

As we have developed two System Portfolios and completed numerous action projects, it has become apparent that accountability must be an integral part of the continuous improvement process. The responsibility for collecting, analyzing, and utilizing data and then assessing results has not always been delineated. Successful improvement is observed when responsibilities are clearly outlined and people are held accountable for the processes.
Lesson Four: Gathering ideas for potential action projects from different groups of the university is an effective approach for developing meaningful projects.

When the university developed its first action projects, the Senior Vice President for Academics held a faculty forum to determine the projects. Subsequent action projects were based on critical issues that faced the university. Our current and new action projects were chosen from a potential list developed from conversations with the Faculty Senate, Staff Council, Administrative Cabinet, Academic Cabinet, and the Graduate Quality Assurance Committee. This approach has allowed for additional involvement by the staff, faculty, and administrators in the process and ultimately led to increased engagement in the action projects. In general we are observing a greater “buy in” by the campus community in the action projects.

Lesson Five:
When the university considers issues that confront it, the thought of using an action project to tackle the issue is becoming part of our way of thinking (our culture).

During the last few years, we have heard faculty, staff and administrators say, “We should make that an action project to deal with this issue.” The AQIP action project approach is an effective vehicle for addressing challenges and issues facing the university. As a result of involving more people in the process of determining and carrying out action projects, our culture is changing and we are more collectively embracing continuous improvement.