Developing an Action Plan Using Institutional Data: Student Learning and Student Engagement

Overview

This small-group workshop will focus on examining institutional data related to student learning and student engagement at The College of the Whimsy Isles (CWI), which faces stringent budget constraints and difficulties with student recruitment and retention. As outcomes of this workshop, participants will develop their skills and abilities in the following areas:

- Analyzing and interpreting multiple sets of financial and related institutional data in the context of a college's Mission and its stated purposes;
- Using those analyses to identify issues that require action;
- Reaching consensus on the relative importance of those issues;
- Selecting an issue for action;
- Developing a one-year action plan to address that issue within the context of a defined and limited budget;
- Communicating results of the activity to the larger group.

The College of the Whimsy Isles: The Situation

As noted above, CWI faces challenges both to enrollments and finances in both the near-term and longer-term. In its last response to a CWI Mid-Term Report, the commission that accredits CWI expressed concerns over the college's financial stability and its ability to demonstrate that student academic achievement was keeping pace with the CWI Mission and Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs). The president is also concerned about how proposed changes to Pell Grant eligibility (changes tied to graduation rates) might affect CWI. She has instituted a hiring freeze and a 2% across-the-board budget cut for the current fiscal year.

Nonetheless, she wants to find ways to reverse the current trends. So she has asked you to serve on a "special action group" to study issues related to student achievement, graduation rates and engagement. She also want to act ahead of time to ease the concerns of the accrediting commission. She wants you to formulate and submit an action plan to address one or more weaknesses in these areas.

She has managed to set aside a budget of $12,000 for you to design and carry out such a plan over a 12-month period. You must budget time, money and scope of work to meet those conditions.

Within the scope of this case study workshop, you have the following five tasks:

1. Study and discuss the Institutional Profile of CWI so that your group has a good sense of its Mission and Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs).

2. Study the data you have been given about student achievement, enrollment and engagement. Relate those data to CWI's effectiveness in achieving its Mission and ILOs.
3. Reach consensus in identifying an issue that, when addressed, will increase that effectiveness.
4. Complete the Action Plan Worksheet to develop in detail your plan for addressing that issue.
5. Report your findings to the larger group of workshop participants.

A note on your group work.

CWI has developed a set of communication principles to enhance purposeful dialogue in the day-to-day work of the college. Among them are three that you should think about when conducting your group work.

- ✓ Encourage participation from all group members. Don't assume that silence means agreement or that people have nothing to say.
- ✓ Be patient. Allow people to complete their thoughts before responding.
- ✓ Think about the impact of your words on others. If you have questions or critical perspectives, voice them in a respectful way that keeps the focus on issues and not on individuals.

The College of the Whimsy Isles: Institutional Profile:

The College of the Whimsy Isles (CWI) is a public two-year institution supported by the Confederation of the States of the Whimsy Isles (CSWI), with a total estimated population of 147,500. CWSI consists of three island states Oroa, Eniwo, and Tikini, each of which is home to a CWI campus. The campuses are roughly 350 miles apart, with only moderate Internet connectivity. The central college administration is housed on the Oroa campus. The College was founded in 1987 and offers associate-level degrees in Business, Education, Nursing and Liberal Arts and vocational certificates in carpentry, automotive maintenance and repair, electronics, marine resources and public safety.

Other Pertinent CWI facts:

Mission Statement
As a student-centered institution, The College of the Whimsy Isles (CWI) has as its mission to prepare students to achieve successful life paths in their chosen fields of study and to become ethical and responsible citizens of Oceania and the larger global community. (Adopted 2010)

Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

- The CWI graduates will demonstrate excellent qualifications in their chosen fields of study.
- CWI graduates will develop and exhibit a passion for life-long learning.
- CWI graduates will become productive contributors to the economy and society of The Republic of the Whimsy Islands.

- CWI graduates will demonstrate the ability to think critically and solve complex problems.
- CWI graduates will demonstrate the ability to communicate successfully in multi-cultural settings.
- CWI graduates will demonstrate understanding of the history and culture of Oceania and their place in the larger global community.

(Adopted 2010)

Demographics

- The current FTE enrollment is 2,187.
  - Ninety-four percent of all CWI students are under the age of 24.
  - Sixty-five percent of CWI students are female.
  - Ninety-six percent of students are residents of CSWI.
  - Ninety-five percent of CWI students receive Pell Grants.
  - In the previous five years, between 78%-81% of entering students have tested into one or more developmental courses.
  - In the previous three academic years, the average of student FTEs in developmental courses ranged between 30.1%-32.7% of total CWI FTEs.

Student Completion and Retention

- Including both degree and certificate programs the CWI two-year completion rate is 13%; the three-year completion rate is 18%, a figure that has remained fairly constant over the previous three years.
- Fall-to-fall retention rates for new students over the last three academic years averaged 48%. Fall-to-fall-to-spring retention rates for returning students over the last three years have averaged 22%.
- CWI has an Admissions Office, but not a formal Enrollment Management function.
- In the academic years (AY) new student enrollment (headcount) at CWI has dropped by 42 and 79 respectively. By campus, the numbers are as follow:

Table 1. New Student Enrollment (Headcount) at CWI—Academic Years 2012 and 2013

Campus	2011-22 AY	2012-13 AY
Oroa	427	408
Eniwo	212	197
Tikini	243	198
CWI Totals	882	803

Coupled with lower retention rates, these numbers indicate significant loss of tuition income and that CWI will face increasing financial pressures in the future.

Student Achievement and Engagement

CWI measures *student achievement* through a linked structure of Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs), Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs), and Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs). CWI formally measures *learning outcomes* through annual assessment reports and biennial program reviews. CWI

measures *student engagement* by administering the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). Summary results of these two measurements appear in the tables that follow.

Remember that data tell stories about the institution. Keep looking for the storylines in the numbers. Look for patterns or differences.

Table 2. Percentage of CWI Students Achieving Learning Outcomes--by Programs.

Program	% of CWI FTEs	% Achieving Required CLOs			% Achieving Required CLOs			% Achieving Required CLOs		
		AY 2010-11	AY 2011-12	AY 2011-13	AY 2010-11	AY 2011-12	AY 2011-13	AY 2010-11	AY 2011-12	AY 2011-13
Business	28	72	71	67	48	46	49	51	47	44
Education	16	81	78	79	56	59	63	54	57	53
Nursing	15	68	70	67	63	66	66	56	58	59
Liberal Arts	22	74	71	76	53	55	61	62	60	63
Certificate Programs	19	75	78	80	72	74	71	--	--	--

In 2013 CWI administered the CCSSE to its students. This survey measures student engagement at the institution through responses to questions in five categories it calls "benchmarks." CCSSE defines these five benchmarks as follows.

★*Active and Collaborative Learning*
Students learn more when they are actively involved in their education and have opportunities to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings. Through collaborating with others to solve problems or master challenging content, students develop valuable skills that prepare them to deal with real-life situations and problems.

★ *Student Effort*
Students' own behaviors contribute significantly to their learning and the likelihood that they will successfully attain their educational goals.

★ *Academic Challenge*
Challenging intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and collegiate quality. These survey items address the nature and amount of assigned academic work, the complexity of cognitive tasks presented to students, and the rigor of examinations used to evaluate student performance.

★ *Student-Faculty Interaction*
In general, the more contact students have with their teachers, the more likely they are to learn effectively and to persist toward achievement of their educational goals. Through such interactions, faculty members become role models, mentors, and guides for continuous, lifelong learning.

★ *Support for Learners*
Students perform better and are more satisfied at colleges that provide important support services, cultivate positive relationships among groups on campus, and demonstrate commitment to their success.

Full CCSSE results provide a detailed breakdown of responses by different classes or respondents and offer institutional comparisons with colleges in the survey cohort. For our purposes in this workshop, we will concentrate on high-level summary data that indicate the percentage of CWI

students responding *positively* to the questions given for each benchmark. So, for our purposes, the higher the percentage, the more favorable the response. Those data appear in the tables below.

Remember our purpose in examining these data is to see if they help to identify an issue in which your "special action group" might work. The data may tell a story that is a piece of a larger puzzle. You need to determine if they do tell a story and how that story fits within CWI's current situation *and* your charge from the president.

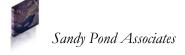**Table 3. Summary Results from 2013 CCSSE Survey-CWI: % Positive Responses and Number of Students Responding.**

CCSSE Benchmark Category	CWI combined		CWI full-time students		CWI part-time students	
Active and Collaborative Learning	67.9	n = 943	68.4	n = 841	66.6	n = 102
Student Effort	65.9	n = 943	66.8	n = 841	63.8	n = 101
Academic Challenge	52.6	n = 943	53.0	n = 841	51.7	n = 102
Student-Faculty Interaction	52.2	n = 943	53.9	n = 840	50.5	n = 103
Support for Learners	73.0	n = 943	72.0	n = 840	75.4	n = 103

Table 4. Summary Results from 2013 CCSSE-CWI by Campus: % Positive Responses and Number of Students Responding.

CCSSE Benchmark Category	Oroa Campus		Iniwo Campus		Tikini Campus	
Active and Collaborative Learning	67.9	n = 643	68.4	n = 178	66.6	n = 122
Student Effort	65.9	n = 643	66.8	n = 178	63.8	n = 122
Academic Challenge	52.6	n = 643	53.0	n = 178	51.7	n = 122
Student-Faculty Interaction	52.2	n = 643	52.9	n = 178	50.5	n = 122
Support for Learners	73.0	n = 643	72.0	n = 178	75.4	n = 122

Your Next Step

Your next step is to use the Preparation Sheet that follows to answer questions about CWI and what the data tell you about the institution in the areas of student achievement and student engagement in light of the *Mission* and the ILOs.
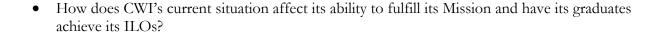
Action Plan Preparation Sheet

Please use this sheet as a way to assemble information that will help you in developing your Action Plan. You can answers these questions in two stages.

Mission and Profile

Based on the CWI's Mission Statement, Institutional Learning Outcomes, and its demographic profile, work together to answer the following:

- What are the critical values that CWI holds as an institution?

- How does CWI's current situation affect its ability to fulfill its Mission and have its graduates achieve its ILOs?

- From the data you have been given, what stories emerge that might describe issues the college ought to resolve? Which of these stories seem most important in their effect on CWI's ability to fulfill its Mission?
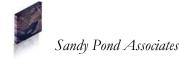
Action Steps

- Among the issues you have identified, are some of them easier to respond to than others? Why are they easier?

- Which of these issues are likely to result in the greatest improvement to student achievement or student engagement? Why?

- With which existing offices or departments on campus will you coordinate your effort?

- How will you coordinate your effort across CWI's three campuses?

- How will faculty be brought into the effort?

- How will staff be brought into the effort?

- Will students be brought into your effort? If so, in what way?

- What steps should CWI's president and key administrators take to support the work of the "special action group?"

Now you should be ready to start on your Action Plan Worksheet.

College of the Whimsy Isles—Action Plan Work Sheet[1]

Once you have agreed upon the issue your group will address, use this work sheet to compile and submit details for the Action Plan to address that issue.

Defining the Issue

Provide a paragraph that defines the issue you have chosen to address (involving either *student achievement* or *student engagement*). Include a statement as to why and to what extent the issue in its current status harms the ability of CWI to fulfill its Mission and achieve its ILOs.

Identifying Supporting Data

From the data you were given, identify which point to the existence of the issue and why that issue needs attention. Cite the numbers, but also use words to tell the story that the numbers reveal.

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[1] This worksheet was broadly adapted from one created by The Council of Independent Colleges and later revised by the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education.

Listing Action Plan Goals

List no more than three goals that, if achieved, would successfully address the issue you have identified. Remember that these goals must be realistic (achieved with the resources at hand and the time frame given) and measurable (success is revealed through specific data).

Defining Key Action Plan Activities

Describe three activities that must combine to achieve the goal(s) of your Action Plan. These activities must be carried out over the one-year limit in the following segments. In this case, our year is 360 days. (*If for practical reasons you feel the need to shift the timing of the segments, feel free to do so, but expect to give a good reasons for the shift.*) General outlines of planning details for each activity appear in the following pages. Complete those outlines for each of your three activities.

Activity 1 (days 1-30)

Activity 2 (days 31-180)

Activity 3 (days 181-360)

Activity 1 Detailed Outline (Days 1-30)
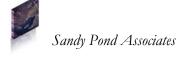
Identifying Additional Data Requirements

Identify any additional data that you will need to complete this activity. If you conclude that no additional data are needed, write "None," but also explain why not.

Listing Tasks for this Activity

List the specific tasks required to complete this activity. Think of such tasks as necessary steps in a process.

Developing Criteria for Success

List the conditions that will exist when the activity has been successfully completed.

Identifying Possible Barriers to Completing the Activity

This part of the outlines asks you to identify either what could go wrong or what existing conditions might make it difficult to complete the activity according to your plan.
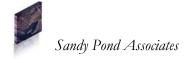
Identifying Resources

Estimate how much of the $12,000 Special Action Budget you will use for each task and for Activity 1 in total. Remember that you still have Activity 2 and 3 yet to complete within this budget. Identify any non-money resources you might need (for example, information or real or virtual meeting space). Placing this information in some sort of table would be ideal.

Planning for Purposeful Dialogue

During this effort *how* and *how often* will you communicate the status of your work for this activity? Which *individuals or offices* should receive these communications? How will you communicate within your group and keep a record of the group's work

Activity 2 Detailed Outline (Days 31-180)

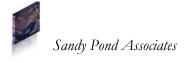## *Identifying Additional Data Requirements*

Identify any additional data that you will need to complete this activity. If you conclude that no additional data are needed, write "None," but also explain why not.

Listing Tasks for this Activity

List the specific tasks required to complete this activity. Think of such tasks as necessary steps in a process.

Developing Criteria for Success

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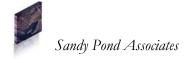## Identifying Possible Barriers to Completing the Activity

This part of the outlines asks you to identify either what could go wrong or what existing conditions might make it difficult to complete the activity according to your plan.

Identifying Resources

Estimate how much of the $12,000 Special Action Budget you will use for each task and for Activity 1 in total. Remember that you still have Activity 3 yet to complete within this budget. Identify any non-money resources you might need (for example, information or real or virtual meeting space). Placing this information in some sort of table would be ideal.

Planning for Purposeful Dialogue

During this effort *how* and *how often* will you communicate the status of your work for this activity? Which *individuals or offices* should receive these communications? How will you communicate within your group and keep a record of the group's work

Activity 3 Detailed Outline (Days 181-360)

Identifying Additional Data Requirements

Identify any additional data that you will need to complete this activity. If you conclude that no additional data are needed, write "None," but also explain why not.

Listing Tasks for this Activity

List the specific tasks required to complete this activity. Think of such tasks as necessary steps in a process.

Developing Criteria for Success

List the conditions that will exist when the activity has been successfully completed.

Identifying Possible Barriers to Completing the Activity

This part of the outlines asks you to identify either what could go wrong or what existing conditions might make it difficult to complete the activity according to your plan.

Identifying Resources

Estimate how much of the $12,000 Special Action Budget you will use for each task and for Activity 1 in total. Remember that you still have Activity 2 and 3 yet to complete within this budget. Identify any non-money resources you might need (for example, information or real or virtual meeting space). Placing this information in some sort of table would be ideal.

Planning for Purposeful Dialogue

During this effort *how* and *how often* will you communicate the status of your work for this activity? Which *individuals or offices* should receive these communications? How will you communicate within your group and keep a record of the group's work

Sandy Pond Associates Fiscal Case Study Workshop Evaluation

For each item identified below, circle the number to the right that best fits your judgment of its quality. Use the rating scale to select the quality number.

Survey Items	Scale			
Please complete this evaluation of today's workshop. Your opinions will help to evaluate and improve such activities. When you complete the evaluation, please return it to one of the vice presidents in attendance or to Norma Edwin.	*Poor*	*Good*		*Excellent*
1. Describe the overall level at which this workshop achieved its stated outcomes of developing your skills and abilities in the following areas? • Analyzing and interpreting multiple sets of financial and related institutional data in the context of a college's Mission and its stated purposes; • Using those analyses to identify issues that require action; • Reaching consensus on the relative importance of those issues; • Selecting an issue for action; • Developing a one-year action plan to address that issue within the context of a defined and limited budget; • Communicating results of the activity to the larger group	1	2	3 4	5
2. Describe the quality of workshop materials.	1	2	3 4	5
3. Describe the level of organization in this workshop.	1	2	3 4	5
4. Describe the level at which the presenter explained your tasks and facilitated the group work.	1	2	3 4	5
5. Describe the level of the presenter's knowledge and interest in carrying out this workshop.	1	2	3 4	5
6. Describe the level of value you would attach to this workshop in helping you participate in college planning and decisions.	1	2	3 4	5
7. Describe the chances that you would attend another such workshop given by this presenter.	1	2	3 4	5
8. Comments				