

23, Number 1 **Student Service Quality Assurance:
A Model That Works**

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Butler County Community College (BCCC) offers the largest off-campus credit operation of any college or university in the state of Kansas. Adult students represent 80% of the college's students. A recent survey of students in outreach locations by Billingsley and Tanner (1990), found that 75% of the students are part time, 85% select their class schedule based on their employment, 43% would not have attended Butler if the outreach programs were not available, 75% were from Sedgwick county, 73% drive less than 20 miles to class, 51% are over 25, 63% are female, and 10% are minorities. In 1983, the outreach programs had approximately 1,400 adult students enrolled. The college now has over 4,100 students enrolled in these programs. Butler County Community College is an "adult educator."

The purpose of this paper is to describe the quality assurance program developed to assure that the quality of educational services will continue to increase as planned growth occurs. The Student Service Quality Assurance model consists of four basic areas: (a) student success, (b)

information access, (c) employee development, and (d) student development, and is represented in Figure 1. The area between the center and the outside ring on the model represents the various programs developed to assure adult student success.

Assuring Student Access

To accommodate these nontraditional students, it is important to provide accessible services. These include providing personnel, local sites, personalized service, and new technology as it becomes available. A national symposium on telecommunications and the adult learner proposed that technology offers the only hope for equality of access to information and education (Brock & Purdy, 1991). The participants proposed that without a technology-based outreach effort, the "have-nots" of the nation will form an information/education underclass.

Community Coordinators

Because Butler serves communities in five counties it is difficult to keep a finger on the pulse of the local population to determine needs and disperse information. Local citizens who have a relationship with the local school system are recruited to become community coordinators for

the college. These well-trained and informed ambassadors are available to local students for information and support.

Freestanding Centers

Fully staffed freestanding facilities are open in those locations that support more than 100 students. These facilities come in the form of a fully staffed office in a local high school, downtown store fronts, and classroom conference centers. Some facilities are free to the college, while others are rented or bought. Occupying a facility in the community lets the students know the college programs are here to stay.

Support Staff Hours

Providing accessible staff is important. Personnel need to be available when the students need them--not eight to five daily! Several years ago when our phone system was on the blink, Ma Bell did a "busy signal" analysis for one of our student service centers to discover that most of our unanswered calls came in a few minutes before 8 a.m., at 10 a.m., during the traditional lunch hour (12 p.m. - 1 p.m.), at 3 p.m. and at 5 p.m. This told us that our students want to conduct business during their normal break times at work. Telephone coverage needs to begin at least one hour before

classes begin in the morning and should extend until the last class is out the door in the evenings.

Customer Service

Students appreciate good customer service. Think of your institution as a retailer of educational services and treat the student as valuable customers. Allow the students to enroll on site. If the teaching site is 90 miles from campus (or even five miles for that matter) it is unreasonable to expect busy students to drive to campus when the transaction can be accomplished locally.

All employees--from the building and grounds staff to the college president--must be trained for positive customer service. Traditionally colleges have the attitude that "We know what is best for the students and they can do it our way or go somewhere else!" Moving to a service posture is painful and slow but well worth the effort. Facilities need to be convenient, technologically modern, and conducive to confidential conversations. Computer access and a financial management system are a must. Any student entering one of our student service centers must be able to be advised, to be enrolled, to pay fees, to buy books, and to leave ready for class.

Students appreciate the convenience of purchasing and reselling their books at the location where their class takes place. This allows them to have the books on the first night of class so that class will begin as intended. Part-time seasonal employees are responsible for reconciliation of daily sales reports. Many colleges have special book buy-back days on the main campus but avoid doing the same at on-site locations. In locations where there is a large concentration of students, bookstore personnel can be available for book repurchase. In more remote locations, book repurchase can take place via mail. The student can mail the book with a completed form and the bookstore can either mail back a check or the book if that particular edition is no longer used.

Alternate Delivery Systems

Community colleges, because of their long-standing commitment to serve nontraditional students through innovative means, often lead the way in implementing and supporting extension and distance-education programs (Hisle, 1990). Butler offers both prepared telecourses and live Instructional Television Fixed Service (ITFS) courses as alternatives to the traditional classroom. Alternative

delivery systems became necessary to better serve adults with an external degree program. This degree program enables the adult students to complete a transferable associate degree in Business Administration or Elementary Education without leaving their rural home communities. The telecourses--prerecorded video programs integrated with print--and other media offer the students the flexibility of managing their time. Every year the mountain of evidence of student, faculty, and institutional satisfaction with the quality and the utility of television courses expands (Brock & Purdy, 1991). Personal finance, general psychology, and geography are common examples of courses taught with this medium. The ITFS courses are transmitted over low power television channels and the students talk back to the instructor over radio waves. Both systems allow the students the flexibility of remaining in their home town environment rather than commuting. This system enables the students to enroll when enrollment may not be enough for a traditional class to make. Accounting, economics, and patenting are examples of quality ITFS offerings. These external degree programs help bridge the gap needed to allow these adult students the chance to attend college and receive an

associate degree that was previously unavailable to them.

Assuring Information Access

Community colleges are in the forefront of those institutions seeking to provide quality learning opportunities for a great diversity of people with very different life goals. This is accomplished by empowering faculty to meet a wide range of differing learning abilities and styles and by having students learn from the wide range of information resources that exist in the real world (Hankin, 1991).

Library Services

Library services are modern interpretations of the old-fashioned library. Major locations are equipped with selected hard copies of reference materials plus the on-line card catalog from the main campus. Readers' Guides are available at all sites. CD-ROMs are used for additional computer searches. Students wishing to access material may call the main campus library to request materials be sent to them via FAX, courier, and/or mail. Books are checked out and articles are photocopied. This service is free of charge to the students at this time.

Microwave Communications

Most of Butler's students must place toll calls when communicating with our main campus. Many people will not call a long distance number. To alleviate this problem and the cost of Watts lines, a microwave system has been installed. This technology allows students on the Wichita exchange to call the BCCC main campus toll free. This system also allows transmission of data without using expensive dedicated phone lines.

Computer Transmission

Computers are used extensively in adult education programs around the nation and BCCC is no exception. Advisors in outlying areas use the campus computer system via modems to pull up student records to determine the progress and needs of the student in an instant. Secretarial staff enter the enrollment information to secure the students a seat instantly thus solving the problem of the class filling before the enrollment can be processed via mail. When students pay their tuition and fees the same computer system allows instant posting.

FAX Communications and Courier Delivery

Communication between the various locations becomes a real challenge without FAX communications and a courier

delivery system. The FAX communication allows all administrative participants in the different sites to communicate hard copy data instantly. Students who are enrolled in and instructors who teach in distance learning such as telecourses or live television can share reports, illustrations, etc., instantly via the FAX, which adds a new dimension to distance learning. A courier service allows organized on-site instructors and administrators the luxury of having their notes, handouts, and tests typed and duplicated in classroom sets and delivered to the site where they will need the materials. All mail for the instructors and staff is also delivered in this one-day service.

Assuring Employee Development

The Division of Adult and Community Education is a customer service oriented organization. The individual efforts of each staff member play an essential role in providing quality programs. By helping each other be successful the entire division becomes successful and the students are the benefactors.

Personal Development Plans on Staff

Acting on this belief, all staff members from the division chair down to the custodian complete a staff

development plan that will allow their supervisor to know what their individual goals are and how those goals relate to the division and college goals. These road maps allow the college to maximize the use of valuable human resources. Many of the associates are enrolled in graduate programs that enable them to move up the organizational chart as vacancies arise.

Staff Training

All levels of associates are enrolled in appropriate staff training when needed or when applicable to the employee's personal development plan. Many of these needs are met in-house in our Business and Industry Institute while others are available from outside vendors.

Adjunct Evaluation System

To assure quality teaching, a plan was established where qualified, specially trained adjunct evaluators are hired and assigned the task of evaluating 300 new and existing adjunct faculty. This system complements the adjunct faculty orientation and peer consultation programs that were designed to improve adjunct faculty teaching skills. As a result, each semester each class can be "visited" by an official representative of the college. This

provides the instructor and the students with another contact with the college.

Assuring Student Development

Assuring student development requires that several components be in place. These components are an adjunct advising system, career planning, student seminars, developmental studies, and peer tutoring.

Adjunct Advising System

Francis (1990) believes that adults go back to school to upgrade professional training, to update credentials, to seek career change, for personal fulfillment, and for social involvement. To accommodate the adult student and the general public, advising is available at all teaching sites before and during class.

To provide an advisor in all locations during all classes, a system needed to be developed. Butler carefully selects and trains adjunct advisors. Their duties include advising students regarding degree requirements and transfer to other colleges, following up on students who have been identified as high risk, and providing awareness of services available. Advisors also assist students with career planning, design and implement a seminar for adult students,

and monitor and report peer tutor needs to the full-time counselor. Thorough training of the adjunct advisor as an ambassador of the college is imperative. The advisor serves as a liaison between the student and the college. As a condition of employment, advisors are expected to attend the pre-service and in-service training sessions that are scheduled approximately every six weeks. These in-service sessions provide training in the following areas: (a) policies and procedures of the college, (b) financial aid, (c) articulation agreements and transfer information, (d) career planning, (e) academic advising, (f) student retention, and (g) the computer guidance system.

Career Planning

As Foxx (1990) points out, a course is needed to engage students in group interaction and critical thinking through issues related to adult development, self-assessment, and goals development. Butler's one credit hour course in career planning is just that. Students enroll in the 18 clock hour course to learn about how they learn, discover their assets and deficiencies, develop study habits, learn to manage stress, explore careers, develop awareness of degree requirements, and go over college policies.

Student Seminars

Adjunct advisors are expected to help prepare and present at least one seminar for outreach students during the year in areas such as adult re-entry, career planning, or job placement. Advisors work in small groups to develop the seminars using their individual expertise.

Developmental Studies

In 1983, Phifer and Person published 1982 data from the Secretary of Education who estimated that, in addition to large numbers of immigrants and refugees for whom English is not the primary language, there were 72 million American adults functioning at or below marginal levels of literacy (cited in Holleman, Tadaro-Cagle, & Murray, 1990). More recent reports by Holleman, Tadaro-Cagle, & Murray (1990) indicate that 20% of the population is illiterate. Developmental study programs prepare students on an individual basis for specific areas of deficiency such as writing, vocabulary, spelling, and geometry.

Peer Tutoring

Students in need of a tutor may contact any advisor and request help. Peer tutors are students who are assigned other students who need their expertise for specific

competency improvement. Tutors are available for most courses.

Conclusion

The Adult and Community Education Division is working diligently to meet the needs of the adult learner. This Student Service Quality Assurance model is a step in the right direction but will never be "complete" since quality assurance is a continuous process and not an end product. As needs and technology change, the model must change with the environment.

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