

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities Luoma Action Learning Project Instructional Cost Management Analysis – Phase Two

In 2006-2007, an Action Research Team was given the charge to identify a research protocol to accompany the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities instructional cost study that chief academic officers could use to make decisions about efficiency and effectiveness in the instructional arena. This action project was Phase One.

In 2007-2008, the district proposed a new action research project “Phase Two” that would utilize the research protocol developed in Phase One to actually analyze the instructional costs at each of the Districts Colleges. Utilizing the dashboard and section cost tools, the Action Research Team analyzed academic and financial data to help chief academic officers determine the roots causes of being “outside the band” in the instructional component of the allocation framework, ensure that instructional costs are coded properly, recommend a common coding system for the District, and identify innovative instructional cost management strategies that could improve the colleges’ circumstances relative to the instructional cost study.

Team Membership:

Susan Anderson, Program Director, Budget Office, Office of the Chancellor
Greg Ewig, Director of Real Estate, Facilities, Office of the Chancellor
Kelly McCalla, English Instructor and Interim Dean of Liberal Arts, Central Lakes College
Doug Olney, Institutional Research Director, Northeast Higher Education District
Rob Waksdahl, Director of Business Services, Lake Superior College

Executive Sponsor: Sue Collins, President, Northeast Higher Education District

Executive Summary

The Action Learning Team evaluated the instructional costs both individually and collectively within the Northeast Higher Education District. Based on our analysis, we made the following recommendations to the Northeast Higher Education District:

1. Identify opportunities for resource sharing and deployment
2. Increase collaboration in the area of course offerings among the District’s colleges
3. Develop a common course prefix, numbering and credit structure across the District to allow for more effective comparisons of data and sharing of curriculum
4. Improve District and system-level coding of instructional data
5. Create benchmarks based on the operations of peer institutions

General Lessons Learned

1. Know (and use) the skills of your team. (Rob’s presentation skills, Kelly’s examples from his campus, Doug’s background within the district and data, Susan’s technical expertise in the instructional cost model, Greg’s technological skills and strategic skills)
2. Be flexible. (We were with regard to meeting times and the substance of the report)
3. Make sure everyone has made a contribution.
4. Leadership can fluctuate in a group depending on circumstances.
5. Never underestimate the usefulness of time spent driving to a meeting.