

2016-2016 Luoma Leadership Academy

Action Learning Project # 7

North Hennepin Community College

Our Action Learning Project was assisting North Hennepin Community College with Undecided Students pursuing an Associate in Arts degree. NHCC administration was concerned that undecided students were not ready to declare a major upon transferring to a university, or were not taking correct classes for their chosen career path. Our charge was to research this issue and recommend strategies to engage the undecided student population.

Following discussions with students, faculty, and staff, we became concerned that student services may be operating in silos (career services, TRIO, tutoring, academic services, advising, parents, other initiatives, etc.). Our conversations revealed people and a college that truly care about their students and a strong desire to better guide students through their two-year experience.

North Hennepin Community College has classes, counselors, and programming toward helping students, so offering another type of service or programming does not seem necessary. We recommend the creation of a campus-wide plan to support currently undecided students. The process used to create the plan is a critical component to successful implementation of this initiative. We include a set of worksheets designed to assist departments/units review existing and possible resources across all relevant sectors of the campus and counter any form of “silo effect”.

We were able to organize our additional observations and comments into four groups: Communications, Partnerships, Advising, and Orientation/Classes/Registration. As a team, we used these groupings to identify a series of secondary strategies that might assist those undecided students.

We learned it was important to develop the big picture and understand how the task fits into the overall process. The questions we asked often led to more questions as we needed more information. We tried to identify all stakeholders in the process and invite them to participate in sharing their perceptions. A combination of direct and indirect questions allowed them to provide information that became important in providing the information used to create our recommendations.

It was important to have someone designated as a lead. That person helped keep the process on target and the group organized and on task. We tried meeting via WebEx, but discovered in-person meetings were the most productive. Letting people use their strengths for project tasks ensured items were finished on-time and completely. Group members appreciated being able to volunteer for project components instead of being assigned. Team members with differing backgrounds and locations sometimes provided logistical challenges and at times made things difficult. However, having that variety provided good insight; people contribute more freely when discussing something within their world of experience.