Developing a Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Plan for Sustaining Growth and Improving Student Success

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Problem:

In recent years, North Hennepin Community College has seen unpredictable enrollments and inconsistent results from various student success initiatives. This trend is expected to continue unless deliberative planning is done. Developing a Strategic Enrollment Management plan would help the college:

1) Achieve predictable enrollments through planning and active management
2) Track and assess student success and engagement initiatives
3) Develop a culture of clean, reliable data available at predictable intervals
4) Construct key performance indicators and use of metrics for decision-making
5) Utilize technology to collect and analyze data
6) Use enrollment and student success to drive other planning at the college

Team Charge:

One of the first steps in developing NHCC's SEM plan was data collection – external and internal. Our Action Learning Team's charge was to develop an Internal Needs Assessment with the following goals in mind guiding the research framework:

1) To better understand the program and service needs of current NHCC students,
2) To better understand NHCC student behaviors and how these behaviors impact their success and/or persistence,
3) To better understand the factors that led past NHCC students successfully completing their goals (transfer, graduation, course completion), and
4) To better understand any barriers that might exist to the success of NHCC students.

Project Overview:

1.) Design research framework [Mixed-methods – quantitative (survey research – Tailored Design Method) and qualitative (focus group)] for an NHCC internal needs assessment.
2.) Construct internal needs assessment instruments (e-survey and focus group protocol).
3.) Complete and submit IRB application to NHCC for approval to conduct research.
4.) Deploy surveys and facilitate multiple stakeholder focus group sessions.
5.) Conduct data analysis; report findings, conclusions, and recommendations to NHCC
6.) Construct internal needs assessment with accompanying research design that receives NHCC IRB approval, including process mapping and gap analysis.

Conclusions and Recommendations based on the Research:

1) **Integrate Key Marketing Messaging:** Integrate key messages about affordability, flexible scheduling, and campus location into all promotional activities.
2) **Research Audience-based Website Layout:** The primary source of gathering information about NHCC is the institutional website. Many higher education websites have developed an audience-based layout identifying prospective students, current students, alumni, and employees. Conduct a study investigating the effectiveness of the current website layout and information specifically for prospective versus current students. There may be an opportunity to more effectively communicate by identifying the specific audience.
3) **NHCC Mobile Website:** Smart phone and tablet technology continues to grow amongst higher education students. Develop a plan to implement an NHCC mobile website.

4) **Focus on Completion Rates:** Focus the majority of messaging on student success through completion. Currently those with the goal of "transferring to a four-year institution" have the highest completion rates amongst our findings. If current trends in higher education towards completion continue it would be recommended to focus on those career goals that yield the highest completion rates for the institution.
5) **Orientation Completion Rate Comparison:** Monitor persistence and completion rates of students that complete the online versus on-site orientation.
6) **Advising Program Incentives:** The use of advising services is vital towards student success and completion. Stop-outs were the most likely group not to have used the advising services. Consider developing an incentive or mandatory advising program. Also research options and access need to make advising more accessible such as evening hours or online advising options.
7) **Explore Book Buying Options:** Lead a discussion amongst the bookstore, student government, and faculty to review book-buying opportunities in higher education including e-books and book rental programs.
8) **Improve Student's Connection to NHCC:** A student connection with NHCC appeared to play a large role in the completion of their educational goals. Conduct a study to further explore the accuracy of this statement and ways to improve student connection and involvement with NHCC.
9) **Focus on Diversity:** NHCC has a great reputation of accepting diversity to the external community. Develop an internal marketing campaign highlighting and celebrating diversity in all forms including those considered traditionally the majority. The focus should be on celebrating diversity not minorities to avoid feelings of reverse discrimination.

Leadership Competencies Illuminated During Action Learning Project:
1) Be competent, thoughtful, and introspective leaders who value the talents and strengths of self and others.
2) Be studied, strategic, forward-thinking, and innovative leaders.
3) Investigate and employ contemporary research and theory into organizational excellence and best practices in management and leadership.
4) Appreciate, respect, value, and work effectively with others by understanding behavioral styles.
5) Dissect processes and strategies for successfully implementing and managing an organizational change.
6) Manage individual and team performance by appropriate delegation.
7) Manage the multiple roles and responsibilities of post-secondary leadership.

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