



Overview

INSTITUTION:

COMMUNITY COLLEGE OF BEAVER COUNTY

PROFILE:

Community College of Beaver County is located in Monaca, Pennsylvania, approximately thirty miles northwest of Pittsburgh. The rural, one hundred acre main campus, together with the Aviation Science Center site, offer an extensive array of Associate Degree programs in arts, sciences, applied science and applied technology as well as certificate programs.

CHALLENGE:

To respond to the Middle States Commission's expectation for a valid outcomes-based assessment plan and documentation of continuous improvement. Also address a need to centralize data management for efficiency.

SOLUTION:

TracDat by Nuventive delivered a systematic, electronic framework for aligning goals and objectives at multiple levels, articulating an outcomes-based plan, managing data in a centralized location and robust reporting for documentation of continuous improvement.

Community College of Beaver County Uses TracDat as Foundation for Ongoing Assessment Process

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-Judy Garbinski, VP for Learning and Assessment

Community College of Beaver County (CCBC) competes in an environment of rising expectations and an increasing demand for well defined and measurable goals and objectives. A significant source of rising expectations across the educational spectrum comes from the accrediting bodies that are charged with evaluating each institution. With each passing year, these agencies are increasing the requirements for planning, execution of plans, measurement and analysis that each institution must accomplish in order to demonstrate continuous improvement.

Late in 2001, CCBC was in the initial stage of formulating its assessment initiative. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (Middle States) was increasing the emphasis on institutional assessment and proposing that the assessment increasingly focus on outcomes. Middle States expected each college to have a valid assessment plan.

Understanding the Challenges

"At this early juncture, there was no structure or process for assessment at Community College of Beaver County," said Judy Garbinski, Vice President for Learning & Assessment. "There was no standardization of methodology or common assessment language and every department took a different approach. The Nursing Department had identified outcomes for its program and each of its courses and was routinely assessing students in a variety of ways. Other departments were only beginning to examine program outcomes, while some had not yet even considered them."

"Another challenge facing CCBC was the lack of centralized assessment data. Information was collected and stored at the individual or department level in a variety of formats. While serving as a member of Middle States Commission teams, visiting colleges for the purpose of self-study validation, this was a problem that I observed at many of the

BENEFITS:

- ✓ Systematic approach establishes a common understanding and language
- ✓ Define and align goals among all levels of the institution and external accrediting agencies
- ✓ Develop, review and revise assessment plan from any Web browser
- ✓ Robust reporting
- ✓ Real time visibility into the assessment process
- ✓ Supporting documents and evidence linked to the plan
- ✓ Integrate new strategies for continuous improvement
- ✓ Monitor and report on progress

institutions,” said Ms. Garbinski. “In my assigned role focusing on assessment review, it was common to find various forms of documentation spread throughout a campus. Many of the colleges did not have a central repository for their information, nor was the information in any standardized format.”

Identifying a Solution

In order to address these challenges and identify a software solution that would facilitate the assessment initiative, the President of CCBC suggested that Ms. Garbinski evaluate TracDat as a potential solution. “In my first review of the application, I immediately recognized the value of TracDat,” Ms. Garbinski stated. TracDat provides a central location to store the faculty data. By establishing a shared understanding of methodology and terminology, the application also offers a systematic approach to implementation and management of the entire assessment process.

Encouraging Collaboration

The use of TracDat at CCBC encourages collaboration. Faculty can input their assessment information from their computers and this information is easy to access and review by any authorized individual. They can also customize and share assessment templates. “By enabling faculty to view and learn from the examples of what others had done, we are able to help alleviate some of the apprehension about using the system,” said Ms. Garbinski.”

Providing Evidence of Progress

One of the key elements of an effective solution is that the institution must be able to demonstrate the progress that is being made. According to Ms. Garbinski, “CCBC found that TracDat’s reporting capabilities are very valuable, particularly those that illustrate the alignment between course objectives and the program and institutional objectives.”

An Ongoing Effort

After the Middle States team visit in 2004 and the decision to implement TracDat throughout CCBC, a number of factors led to a hiatus in the assessment project. CCBC undertook an institution-wide initiative that resulted in changes and updates to the institution’s core mission and goals, key personnel changes were made to the assessment team, and a new IT Director was hired. The assessment process at Community College of Beaver County currently focuses on aligning goals and objectives across the institution. “TracDat prompts the user to consider program goals and how they relate to institution goals,” explained Ms. Garbinski. “If the relationship cannot be determined, the program goal must be reexamined. This goal and objective alignment is essential at every level.” The Nursing Department at CCBC has progressed to setting goals at the course level.

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“A key feature of TracDat is the ability of faculty to customize and share assessment templates. This helped to alleviate some of the apprehension about using the system by enabling faculty to view and learn from the examples of what others had done.”

Judy Garbinski, VP for Learning and Assessment

The department has documented goals or outcomes along with the related assessment strategies, and has already demonstrated changes in their courses based on data collected from the assessments. Although progressing, this process has not yet expanded to all areas of the institution. The assessment team is working one-on-one with faculty and other members of the college community to develop target outcomes and the strategy and process of how they will be assessed.

Follow-up Visits from Middle States

CCBC has had two visits from the Middle States Commission since implementing this assessment process. Feedback from Middle States as a result of their regular ten-year visit in 2004 was that the early adoption of TracDat and assessment efforts showed promise, but that CCBC needed to show more progress toward a viable assessment plan. In the 2006 follow-up visit, the Middle States representative was impressed by their progress. “We are committed as an institution to using the assessment process as a critical tool for demonstrating continuous improvement throughout Community College of Beaver County,” said Ms. Garbinski. “It is an ongoing effort that continues to evolve as we improve the collective assessment skills of CCBC.”

Nuventive
9800 B McKnight Road
Suite 255
Pittsburgh, PA 15237

Phone: +1 412 847 0280
Toll Free: 1 877 366 8700
Fax: +1 412 847 0285
Email: info@nuventive.com

