

## Category Eight: Planning Continuous Improvement

**8C1 Vision:** During 2004, the institutional Strategic Planning Committee met to develop a new plan, "Vision 2010." This committee had representatives from faculty, administration, the Board of Trustees, and the student body. The College had received a Title III Planning Grant of \$29,000 in October 2003, and that grant provided funding for the planning effort under the leadership of a consultant. In March 2005, the Board of Trustees adopted the proposed plan and a new vision statement. As published in the 2008 – 2009 Catalog for the College, the vision is that "[i]n 2010, Glen Oaks Community College will be the primary higher education and workforce development center for students, families, businesses, and communities in St. Joseph County and the surrounding area."

This vision centers on six board-adopted Core Strategies to be addressed during the 2005 – 2010 period:

- ◆ **Learner Success Initiative:** Glen Oaks will advance all aspects of the learner's journey through the college, focusing all college units on creating programs and services that respond to changing student learning needs and enhance student success.
- ◆ **Community Connectedness Initiative:** Glen Oaks will enhance its communications

and connectedness with communities in its service area, and a new model for career education in service to area businesses will be developed.

- ◆ **Continuous Quality Improvement Initiative:** Glen Oaks will institutionalize principles of continuous quality improvement for the operation of the college.
- ◆ **Technology Initiative:** Glen Oaks will significantly upgrade instructional equipment, electronic-based learning, communications, and information technologies.
- ◆ **Employee Communications and Development Initiative:** Glen Oaks will develop and implement a college-wide employee communications/development program.
- ◆ **Financial Future Initiative:** The voters of the college's legal district will, with the college, determine its financial future.

The above Core Strategies are multi-year highest priority initiatives that are intended to transform or significantly improve the College's programs, services, structures, and systems. These priorities are reexamined annually as a part of the recommitment to institutional vision,

mission, and strategic planning. Representing all employee groups, the College Council serves as the key organizational committee charged with oversight of the institutional strategic planning process. This group also provides oversight on the effectiveness of the planning processes, encourages improvements in college systems and activities, and provides oversight on the performance of action plans undertaken to carry out the Core Strategies.

### **8C2 Short- and Long-Term**

**Strategies:** The work of the College Council (8P1) as it designed and implemented a plan for goal development assisted in the alignment of the Core Strategies with the College's Vision and Mission ("Transforming Lives and Advancing Communities").

Six Core Strategy Teams formed by the College Council worked throughout 2005 to create goals related to each of the Core (long-term) Strategies. During the winter 2006 semester, the College Council reviewed, prioritized, and condensed fifty-two goals proposed by those teams. The result was twenty (bulleted) Strategic Goals:

#### **Learner Success Initiative:**

- Develop a plan that enhances the success of students from initial inquiry through completion of student goals.
- Create a faculty/staff development plan that supports learner success.

- Develop academic program completion patterns for full-time and part-time learners.

#### **Community Connectedness**

##### **Initiative:**

- Develop a community relations plan.
- Develop a diversity plan.
- Develop a partnership model/plan with business/industry/K-12/government agencies.
- Develop a marketing plan.

#### **Continuous Quality Improvement**

##### **Initiative:**

- Identify and flowchart the systems and processes of the College.
- Develop and distribute a CQI model.
- Create teams to advance the knowledge and practices of CQI.
- Develop and implement an employee CQI training plan.

#### **Technology Initiative:**

- Provide the technical framework to improve communications among all aspects of the college, representative of current business and industry standards.
- Access knowledge and provide training for college staff in the use of the college's information system.
- Access and provide technology and training that meets the needs of instructional technology users.

### **Employee Communication and Development Initiative:**

- Create and implement a comprehensive human resources plan.
- Create and implement an effective college-wide communication plan.

### **Financial Future Initiative:**

- Develop and utilize an open and transparent budgeting process that aligns resources with strategic goals.
- Optimally utilize college resources.
- Implement a development plan for the leadership team to create new initiatives that generate additional revenue.
- Implement short- and long-term facilities plans in alignment with the college's strategic goals.

Also during winter 2006, the College Council further indentified four of the above twenty goals as Areas of First Focus (short-term goals):

- ◆ Develop a plan that enhances the success of current and future students from initial inquiry through completion of student goals.
- ◆ Provide the technical framework to improve communication between all aspects of the college, including internal and external stakeholders.
- ◆ Create and implement an effective college wide communication system
- ◆ Create and implement a comprehensive human resources plan.

In addressing the Areas of First Focus, the College Council designed Project Development Teams (8P1) to design key action projects which would involve volunteer participation (approximately 33% of the College's full-time employees) in the action phase of each. The teams that developed around the projects involve personnel from all employee groups in the hands-on integration of the College's strategic plan into institutional systems and processes.

The following list cites the twelve College Council projects as they correlate to the Areas of First Focus:

#### ***Enhancement of Learner Success***

- Develop a first year student success program.
- Develop a system to measure students' progress toward achieving stated institutional attributes/educational values.

#### ***Technology***

- Improve the telecommunications systems at Glen Oaks.
- Redesign the Glen Oaks' Website to be professional and user friendly.
- Implement Web registration.
- Install LCD projectors in classrooms that currently do not have them.
- Evaluate computer classroom usage.

### ***Communication System***

- Hold three college-wide meetings per year.
- Create an employee information Web page.

### ***Comprehensive Human Resources Plan***

- Recommend to the Board of Trustees to begin consideration and development of a process for choosing the College's future presidents.
- Consider opportunities to reorganize in the event of changes in leadership personnel.
- Embrace a centralized human resources philosophy and develop and implement a comprehensive human resources plan.

The processes for the development of the strategic plan, for the design of the College Council, and for the formation of both strategy teams and project development teams assured the alignment of long-term and short-term strategies and of College Council projects with the vision and mission of the College.

**8P1 Planning Process:** The 2003 strategic planning process began with the College President appointing the Strategic Planning Committee and assigning its chair. The committee was a cross-functional team of seven employees representing administration and faculty, one Board of Trustees member, and one student. The President was an ex-officio member.

This committee developed the plan, and, as necessary, modified it. The development of the plan began with a review of the former plan to ensure that unfinished tasks were considered for inclusion in the new one.

An important aspect of the plan development was the early formation of eight assessment teams to evaluate specific elements, representing the strategic framework for the College:

- Student Support Services
- Curriculum Development
- Community Development
- Enrollment Planning and Development
- Policy Development and Board of Trustees Development
- Shared Services Development
- Resource Development, Coherence, and Alignment
- Institutional Learning and Growth, Continuous Quality Improvement.

To make recommendations related to their charge area, the teams used the analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT). In a summary report, each team provided short-term and long-term goals for its area of concentration. The Strategic Planning Committee used the reports to develop a listing of strengths and a listing of areas for improvement and development of the College overall. Data collection was done to support the assessment teams and to provide information for strategies

and goals. The output of these teams was used to develop the College Foundational Statements that include the following elements:

- Mission Statement
- Vision Statement
- Values
- Functions
- Service Area
- Constituencies Served.

Another important aspect of the planning process was focus groups that met to provide critical input on the Foundational Statements of the plan that had been drafted and to provide commentary on how the College could better operate. A total of eight focus groups was held: one with the College's Student Government, three with employees, and four at off-campus sites with citizens invited from each of the eight communities of the college district. All focus groups answered six questions concerning what they liked about the College, what they would change about the College, what others they knew thought about the College, how the College could get increased support from the communities, what they saw the College being five years hence, and what obstacles they saw between the present and the most desired future. In addition, all groups critiqued the draft of the Vision Statement, and the employee group critiqued the values, functions, service area, and constituencies served.

The Strategic Planning Committee used the critiques and commentaries of the focus groups to revise the Foundational Statements of the

College. The Strategic Planning Committee and the Leadership Council of the College used the results of these focus groups to finalize Core Strategies.

In early December 2004, the final draft of the Strategic Plan was written and submitted to the Strategic Planning Committee for a final critique. The plan was then forwarded to the Leadership Council of the College for review. From there the plan was presented for study and approval by the Board of Trustees.

Receipt of the College's Systems Appraisal Feedback Report (December 2004) and participation in a second Strategy Forum (January 2005) focused institutional attention on how best to integrate planning and quality improvement initiatives. To determine how best to achieve that integration and improvement, a new AQIP Action Project was developed to design and launch the College Council strategic planning model. As part of the Project, the members of the College's initial AQIP Team and the College's participants in the Strategy Forum met weekly throughout the winter 2005 semester to assess the feedback on the Systems Portfolio and to proceed with work begun at the Strategy Forum.

This group, comprised of administrators, faculty, and support staff, worked out the logistical process by which a joint strategic planning and quality advancement team would be formed. Thus, the College Council was developed with

membership to include personnel from each of the above three employment areas of the institution. Half of the membership was to be elected from a pool of volunteers, and half was to be appointed by the College President. Deans of the institution were to be included by virtue of their positions, and the President would serve ex officio.

The above design team also developed a broad statement of function for the Council and a flow chart to clarify the Council's purpose. Representatives of the design team presented the proposed membership model and statement of function to employees at three in-house meetings and to the Board of Trustees for approval. In April 2005, the election and appointment of members of the Council took place, and the College Council met for the first time in May 2005.

In the summer 2005, an AQIP facilitator conducted two on-site training sessions for Council members. With this direction, the Council worked through its purpose, values, structure, function, and agreements of belonging. The Council reviewed the six Core Strategies which had been developed by the earlier Strategic Planning Committee and approved by the Board of Trustees (8C1). The Council established structure for Strategy Teams that would create goals related to each of the Strategic Plan Core Strategies (8C2). Furthermore, the Council identified needed data and arranged for the data to be collected in fall 2005 through a series of four CLARUS

Corporation Scans conducted by that contracted independent agency. These included Workforce Development, Community, Students, and High School scans. In addition, comparative data on the college culture would be gained through administration of the Personal Assessment of the College Environment (PACE) survey for college employees. This survey, designed by the National Initiative for Leadership and Effectiveness (NILIE), would yield data to support the decision-making processes of the Strategy Teams.

At the beginning of the fall 2005 semester, the Council formed the six Core Strategy Teams to address the six Board-approved initiatives (8C2). Each team, where possible, included administrators and employees who volunteered for the team and represented each employment area within the College. At least two Council members volunteered for each team and served as both a communication conduit between the Council and the team and a process trainer for the team. Approximately forty percent (40%) of the institution's employees were involved in this goal-generating process. During the fall 2005 semester, each team referenced, where applicable, the newly gathered data, generated goals related to its specific Core Strategy, and submitted them to the College Council.

During the winter 2006 semester, the College Council reviewed, prioritized, and condensed the fifty-two proposed goals to twenty and further identified four of the twenty as Areas

of First Focus (8C2). The Council submitted the twenty goals and the Areas of First Focus to the Board of Trustees in May 2006. With their adoption by the Board, the Core Strategies and their related twenty goals became the substance of Vision 2010. The Areas of First Focus became the 2006 – 2007 foci of that strategic plan.

During summer 2006, the College Council met to develop a system whereby strategic planning moved from plan to process and, thereby, the Strategic Plan from paper to integration into institutional systems related to the Areas of First Focus. This integration occurred through the implementation of diverse projects designed by Project Development Teams (PDT). The system to design, form, and train those teams became an AQIP Action Project.

In July 2006, the College President and the Leader of the College Council sent a letter to all college employees inviting volunteer membership in one of the PDT's. The College Council reviewed the responses received in August. Then the Council recommended the volunteers and, where appropriate, additional personnel to be appointed by the President of the College to specific Core Strategy Project Development Teams.

At the college-wide meeting held at the beginning of the fall semester 2006, the College Council announced the membership of each team and provided the teams with a Council-designed project development form for the reporting of

proposed projects. Each PDT had to connect its proposal to an Area of First Focus, address project rationale and objectives, and provide the method for determining the completion of the project. In addition, the team addressed assumptions and constraints and explained the scope and deliverables of the proposed project.

During the first week of October 2006, the College Council provided training for the PDT membership. Following that, the four teams worked for six weeks developing project proposals. The teams submitted the proposals to the College Council at the end of November 2006.

The Council developed and applied a rubric for prioritizing the proposals and, in December 2006, approved twelve key action projects. Furthermore, the Council created forms for facilitating the interim and final reporting by the PDT's on each approved project. Following an evaluation of the process in summer 2007, the College retired the AQIP Action Project through which the PDT's were designed, formed, and trained. That retirement created and institutionalized a cyclical process whereby specific goals related to the 2005 – 2010 Strategic Plan Core Strategies will rotate into Areas of Focus (short-term goals) to be adopted by the Board and whereby Core Strategy Project Development Teams will be formed to develop key projects for the new Areas.

As this institutional process continues, the College Council will

review, prioritize, and publicize the remaining sixteen of twenty proposed goals prior to their being recommended to the Board for adoption and assignment to new Core Strategy Project Development Teams.

**8P2 Selection of Strategies:** For 2005 – 2010, the College’s Leadership Council (President, Dean of the College, Associate Dean of Instruction, Assistant Dean of Nursing and Allied Health, Chief Operations Officer, and Dean of Student and Community Service) selected the priority initiatives of the College. The strengths and the areas for improvement and development noted in the assessment teams’ findings and recommendations (8P1) guided the Leadership Council in the selection of these long-term strategies, the Core Strategies of “Vision 2010” (8C1).

Upon Board approval, the Core Strategies became the working document of the College Council which identified areas of First Focus (short-term strategies) and which designed Project Development Teams to identify key action plans for those strategies.

A tri-fold publication designed by the College Council presents the Core Strategies and Strategic Goals of “Vision 2010” to internal and external stakeholders.

Furthermore, at the initial college-wide meeting of each academic year, the Council distributes its annually updated tri-fold publication.

The tri-fold reviews the Council’s prior accomplishments and presents its planned activities for each current year. Most recently the publication also acknowledged that nearly 60% of full-time employees and members of the Board of Trustees have demonstrated a commitment to the College’s mission and vision by volunteering time and talents to address the strategies and goals of “Vision 2010.” This publication is available to all stakeholders.

**8P3 Development of Key Action Plans:** Key action plans (projects) become the logical extension of the strategic planning process and the processes of the College Council as addressed in 8P1.

Through its design and implementation of interim and final reports by Project Development Teams (PDT’s), the College Council tracks and communicates the progress of Council Action Projects (key action plans). Each PDT reports orally and in print to the Council at least once per academic semester. The interim report includes the following elements:

- How stakeholders have been and will be impacted by the project
- A timeline of progress and expected milestones
- Budget issues
- Methods used in working on the project that may be innovative or of interest to the Council
- Challenges or opportunities discovered.

Upon completion of a project, the PDT also presents an oral and a written report to the College Council. This final report notes appropriate elements from the interim report(s) and, thus, describes the completion of the project. In addition, the final report presents any future projects or spin-off projects and required follow-up. The report also notes any improvement opportunities discovered by the PDT.

Verbal reports are recorded in the minutes of the College Council, and written reports, as are all Council minutes, are posted on the College's shared drive for access by all personnel. The annual publication of the College Council's tri-fold (8P2) and three college-wide meetings scheduled each year serve to further communicate the progress on projects.

***Opportunity for improvement:***  
Processes need to be improved for communicating specifically to students and key stakeholder groups.

**8P4 Coordination and Alignment:**  
By design and function, the College Council is the agent of coordination and alignment of the planning processes and overall institutional strategies and action plans with the varying institutional departments and units. Comprised of administrators, faculty, and support staff (8P1), the Council's representative membership contributes to coordination and alignment at all levels.

Furthermore, coordination and alignment are increased by the

extent to which the Core Strategy teams and Project Development teams of the Council (8C1) involve College personnel in the planning processes. Approximately 40% and 33% of full-time employees participated in the respective planning teams with 60% of full-time employees involved in implementation.

**8P5 Selecting Measures and Setting Performance Projections:**

As part of the planning process, each Project Development Team (PDT) must complete a College Council-designed project development form for its proposed action plan (8P1). Completion of the form requires each team to address measures and performance projections.

Because each proposed project (action plan) is directly linked to an Area of First Focus and, thereby, to a Core Strategy of the strategic plan, the measures for individual plans combine to measure progress on the Core Strategy as a whole.

**8P6 Appropriate Resource Needs:**

The completion of the project development form also requires that each team addresses the resource needs of its proposed project. The team identifies assumptions and constraints as it explains the scope and deliverables of its plan.

The direct links between approved projects and Board-approved Areas of First Focus and Core Strategies of "Vision 2010" (the institutional strategic plan) ensure both institutional priority and funding

support of the action plans and their identified resource needs.

**8P7 Professional Development:**

In an attempt to align the institutional strategic planning results [Core Strategies, Strategic Goals, Areas of First Focus, and College Council Projects (8C1 and 8C2)] with declared AQIP Action Projects and AQIP Categories, the College Council charted all activities and assigned a primary sponsor for each Strategic Goal. For “Vision 2010,” primary sponsors are members of the College’s Leadership Council (See 8P2).

As the primary sponsors monitor progress on individual action projects, they also monitor the need for development and nurture of faculty, staff, and administrator capabilities to address requirements regarding the specific projects and broader strategic goals. By virtue of their administrative positions on the Leadership Council, the primary sponsors are able to effectively advocate for and secure funding for necessary professional development.

Furthermore, the development of action plans from Board-approved Core Strategies ensures financial support for professional development related to plan implementation.

**8P8 Measures of Effectiveness of the System for Planning**

**Continuous Improvement:** The College Council has developed, implemented, and evaluated an institutional process for acting upon broad strategic plan Core Strategies

through specific College Council Projects (1P1). This process for planning continuous improvement is in a pilot stage of developing and implementing projects for the 2006 – 2007 Areas of First Focus. In part, the effectiveness of the planning process has been measured simply by the establishment of the initial projects. The system worked. The repetition of this Core Strategies-to-Council Projects process for the remaining sixteen of twenty proposed goals will provide comparative measures of its effectiveness: numbers of participants volunteering for project teams and project completion rates.

The College Council is currently monitoring the twelve projects related to the initial four Areas of First Focus (8C1). Annual interim reports update the Council on the progress of the projects, and final reports address their completion (8P1). As of summer 2008, three of the projects are completed, seven are on-going, one has been tabled, and one has been cancelled.

Project specific pre- and post-data will measure each project’s effectiveness and resulting improvements. However, the repetition of the planning process itself, its becoming an institutional system for planning continuous improvement, will reveal the process’s effectiveness.

**8R1 Results of Planning:** The design and launch of the College Council as a representative body of the College whose purpose is to develop, align, and integrate

planning processes has led to the identification of twenty strategic goals, four Areas of First Focus, and twelve Council projects. All these extend from "Vision 2010" and its six Core Strategies (8C2).

Furthermore, through the work of the Council the number of participants in the planning process has increased. Over 50% of employees participated in strategic planning; approximately 40% in goal setting, and 33% in project development. Implementation of the Council projects, however, involved nearly 60% of full-time employees.

The list of completed Council projects as they connect to Areas of First Focus reflects the results of not only the Council's process but also the College's institutional strategies and action plans:

#### ***Enhancement of Learner Success***

- Participation in October 2005 and May 2007 HLC Workshops, "Making a Difference in Student Learning: Assessment as a Core Strategy"
- Participation in October 2007 HLC Workshop, "Commitment vs. Compliance: Building Shared Responsibility and an Institutional Culture for Assessing and Improving Student Learning"
- Application to and acceptance in the HLC Academy for Assessment of Student Learning (2007)

- Implementation of a pilot plan to assess student learning (2006)
- Development of GEN 101, a student success portfolio course (2008)

#### ***Technology***

- Redesign of the Glen Oaks' Web site (2008)
- Hiring of an institutional Webmaster (2008)
- Replacement of outdated analog phone system with a VoIP system (fall 2008)

#### ***Communication System***

- Addition of a third college-wide meeting per year (2008)
- Redesign of the College Website (2008)
- Increase of regularly scheduled meetings between President and employee groups (2007)

#### ***Comprehensive Human Resources Plan***

- Development of a process for choosing the College's future presidents (2007)
- Hiring of the Executive Director of Human Resources (2008)

#### **8R2 Projections for Performance:**

For the next one to three years, work on incomplete current Council projects (8C2) will continue as needed. In addition, the planning process will recycle as the sixteen remaining strategic goals are reviewed by the Council (8P1). As a result of this review, the Council may identify new Areas of Focus and establish new Project Development

Teams to bring forward new action plans. It is important to note, however, that it is not necessary for all work on goals to be accomplished through Council project teams.

**8R3 Comparisons of Projections:**

The College has no comparative data to evaluate how its strategies and action plans compare with those of other higher education institutions.

However, the six Board-adopted Core Strategies (8C1) reflect the mission of the College, align with the Higher Learning Commission's focus on student learning, and address both external and internal stakeholders' needs as presented in data collected in fall 2005 (8P1).

**8R4 Evidence of Effectiveness:**

The stakeholder participation in (8P4) and the completion of Council projects (8R1) are evidence of the effectiveness of the College's system for planning for continuous improvement.

The College Council has effectively collected data for planning through CLARUS Corporation scans, the PACE survey, and the Noel-Levitz inventory (8P1). However, that data now must be used for improvement, and scans and surveys must be repeated for comparison data and to support the achievement of goals.

In addition, the Council needs to evaluate its effectiveness as a planning body through a review of its processes for planning. Thereby the Council may move closer to closing process gaps and creating process cycles.

**8I1 Improvement Process:** With the completion of the initial Council projects, one cycle of planning is nearly fully carried out. The College Council now has the opportunity to evaluate its current processes and systems.

As part of Council-sponsored events, evaluations are completed by internal stakeholders. Each evaluation asks for improvement suggestions. These suggestions, however, relate more to the specific event, for example, a college-wide meeting and whether its format could be improved, and not to the Council's planning process applied to the formation of the event.

The Council is open to improvement and has applied the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle to some of its planning processes during its two-year existence. However, it may be helpful for the Council to seek an external, objective evaluation.

**8I2 Improvement Priorities and Communication Thereof:**

The College Council's Core Strategies-to-Council Projects planning process sets targets for improvement. Re-administration of surveys and scans will provide comparative data for the Council to use as it reviews the remaining Strategic Goals. Specific improvement priorities will be identified through the review process.

Communication of the results of current action plans, the identification of new targets, and the need for new project teams occurs in

multiple ways. Formal reports presented to the Board of Trustees, GroupWise electronic communications, reports posted on the electronic shared drive, and presentations at each of the three college-wide meetings held each year target internal stakeholders and inform them of the results of Council projects and of improvement priorities.

The printed tri-fold publication of the Council communicates Council activities and Strategic Goals to internal and external stakeholders. In addition, community presentations by College personnel, the College Web site, and the College news report to the community, *Connections*, provide information to both stakeholder groups.

**Opportunity for improvement:** Students should be included in regular communication cycles and through multiple methods in order to ensure that this key stakeholder group is integrated into college feedback processes.