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Defining Runaround:
The Student Perspective

Sullivan University

LIBRARY and CAI Partnership

The mission of the CAI (Campus Action Initiative) begins:

"The Campus Action Initiative, a comprehensive cross departmental collaboration, is dedicated to enhancing the university experience through continuous improvement of the way we communicate and participate to enhance the quality of life throughout the campus and community."

The members of CAI are constantly looking for activities around campus that fit their goals. The CAI committee hoped that the focus groups would, through comments and feedback, create new goals and areas around campus to target for improvement.

The library has its own annual survey; however, as one of the main campus information points, it was logical the Library participate in this process. We felt being involved with each focus group discussion would give additional insight not apparent from a summary report. Working with the CAI Committee to conduct this process ensures the library's presence in campus-wide discussions and emphasizes our commitment to working together for the good of the University.

FORMING the FOCUS GROUPS

Initial efforts to form focus groups by recruiting interested students through faculty recommendation and campus signage did not generate large enough groups for an adequate survey.

We decided instead to use the BUS224 classes (Professional Development) for our first effort. There were four sections of BUS224 at Lexington during Spring Quarter. Students enrolled in these classes are typically in their last quarter before graduation and would have been around campus quite some time, providing depth of experience.

Total group participation was 45 students, or 6% of total enrollment for spring quarter.
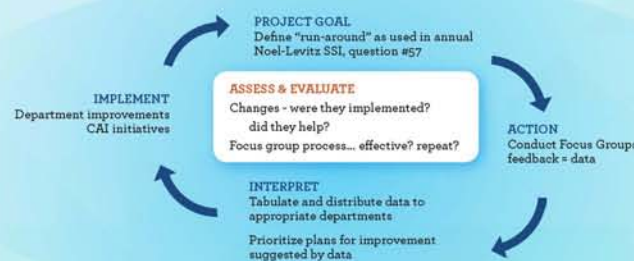
QUESTIONS ASKED

1. *What does the term RUNAROUND mean to you?*

2. *Can you talk about the time you have EXPERIENCED RUNAROUND?*

3. *WHERE at SULLIVAN have you experienced RUNAROUND?*

4. *HOW DOES THIS MAKE YOU FEEL?*

5. *What SUGGESTIONS would you make to REDUCE RUNAROUND?*

6. *OTHER improvements suggestions?*

7. *ANY additional comments?*

FOCUS GROUP PROJECT GOALS

Each year when Sullivan University Deans and Department Chairs review our Noel-Levitz SSI results, we examine any ranking that has a gap score of 0.60 or higher. One question that meets this criteria is question #57, consistently rated by students as important to them but not satisfying.

Understanding how students define *run-around* can be very subjective; the actual complaint could range from simple or quite complex. A better understanding of the viewpoint behind run-around was critical to a more accurate view of the problem.

In the spring of 2014, the library staff partnered with members of the CAI Committee to conduct a series of focus groups to survey students on their impressions when answering this question, in the hope this additional clarification would make both our assessment efforts and plans for improvement easier.

PROJECT GOAL
Define "run-around" as used in annual Noel-Levitz SSI, question #57

IMPLEMENT
Department improvements
CAI initiatives

ASSESS & EVALUATE
Changes - were they implemented? did they help?
Focus group process... effective? repeat?

ACTION
Conduct Focus Groups
feedback = data

INTERPRET
Tabulate and distribute data to appropriate departments
Prioritize plans for improvement suggested by data

ACTION ITEMS - suggested by STUDENTS

- Offer mini-survey or follow up with an e-mail after contact, such as interaction with someone in Financial Planning or Academic Services.
- More communication to students about how to limit Student Success contacts, both frequency and timing.
- Increase topics that can receive tutoring – such as legal research.
- Continue mentoring contact beyond first quarter.

Communication is Critical!

ACTION ITEMS - suggested by STAFF

- Adapt business model of "product knowledge" training for staff in each department that assists students. Would allow for more appropriate referrals when directing someone to another desk or department.
- Students like to be informed about things happening on campus, even if events won't affect them – increase efforts to update students regularly about changes such as new staff or organizational changes; -consider the night student population particularly since their time on campus can be more limited than day students.
- Each campus department utilizes some form of social media to connect with students, use these forums to cross-announce campus events and deadlines. For example: use the library's facebook page to give students a reminder about add/drop deadlines or importance of talking with advisor.
- Sometimes we don't 'hear' what is being asked, hence sending them off to another office, only to be returned or frustrated. Practice the warm referral method – start with a call to office where the student is going to alert them; find out who they should talk with so they are arriving with a name and take a minute to walk them over –or– provide clear directions.

A few LESSONS Learned

- *add method for students to provide follow-up feedback. Students mentioned later they had things they wish they'd said, create comment form or distribute an e-mail address.*
- *include FYE101 classes (first or second quarter students) in addition to the BUS224 groups (pending graduation students) for the "newbie" perspective.*
- *set time limits to ensure each question gets some discussion time.*
- *rehearse how to tactfully stop "rants" from taking too much time.*
- *draft a consistent (and concise) explanation for each group to explain the focus group process, why we want to know these things and what happens next.*

NOEL-LEVITZ 2012 NATIONAL RESEARCH REPORT

In a 2012 report on service quality, Noel-Levitz highlighted the run-around issue, stating:

"As indicated, there is widespread dissatisfaction in areas that matter to students—the service 'runaround' and concerns for students as individuals."

In this report, Noel-Levitz theorizes the root of this problem lies in staff training and staff ownership of student problems. They also view run-around as a more serious problem for adult students rather than traditional college students.

Noel-Levitz (2012) 2012 national research report on quality service. Coralville, Iowa. Author. Retrieved from www.noellevitz.com/Benchmark

YEAR	IMPORTANCE	PERFORMANCE GAP
2014	5.91	0.82
2013	6.14	1.04
2012	6.00	0.57
2011	6.15	0.96
2010	6.09	0.64
2009	5.99	0.69

FEEDBACK - Expect the Unexpected

The types of comments we got from students were a combination of both the expected and unexpected, both compliments and criticism.

Certain campus departments were mentioned at each session:
- *Financial Planning—surplus timing, communication issues*
- *Bookstore—book prices, inventory*
- *Student Success (a retention initiative)—frequency of contact*
- *Student Services—parking, food availability on campus, timing of campus events*

Unexpected topics included:
- *Classroom instruction—use of PowerPoint slides*
- *Security cameras—student thought we needed more, particularly in parking lot*
- *Mentoring Program—wanted New Student Mentoring to continue past first quarter*
- *Class availability—class schedule to more closely match their personal schedules*

And finally, there were topics that were expected, but not mentioned:
- *IT problems—network down time, Student Portal access issues*
- *Library—connecting via remote access, availability of full-text articles*

What Happens Next?

For 2014, our students took the Noel-Levitz survey during May – just a few weeks after we conducted our Focus Groups. Results were received in June and will be distributed to administration, faculty and departments in upcoming months.

A summary of the focus group responses were distributed to campus administration, deans and department chairs that review and assess the Noel-Levitz results. A report will also be given to members of the CAI Committee to review as they plan for initiatives and outreach during fall quarter and beyond.