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ABSTRACT

This document presents a summary of the Parkland College (Illinois) Institutional Effectiveness model, designed to provide a measure of how well Parkland's instructional support units are achieving their stated goals and document how they contribute to the College's mission. The assessment format includes the following steps: (1) evaluating the goals of the support unit with respect to the college's mission and purpose statement; (2) defining objectives; (3) evaluating data; and (4) applying the results of the evaluation to improve the service quality of the unit. The paper describes two successful implementations of the assessment process (the College planetarium and bookstore) and outlines challenges and important lessons learned. For example, the assessment cycle has been shortened from 3 years to 18-24 months, the forms used to control the process have been modified based on participant feedback, and the assessment process now requires units to identify objective goals and criteria for success. The final lesson discussed in the paper concerns the need for a stronger link between the assessment results and institutional planning. (RC)

Instructional Support Units: The Final Frontier . . . The Voyages of a Two-year Community College in Institutional Effectiveness

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"Pre-flight" . . . Background

In 1991, Parkland College revised its mission and purposes statement to incorporate the construction of a Institutional Effectiveness Model. In the next several years, the model was developed illustrating the links between the College's *Mission and Purposes* and the components of an assessment plan. This model is comprised of two processes, *Academic Assessment*, which focuses on assessing student academic achievement, and *Institutional Effectiveness*, which evaluates the instructional support units. By 1995, the College had embarked on an unprecedented journey ("to boldly go where no-one has gone before") by initiating a continuous improvement process evaluating the "new life and civilizations" of instructional support units, the purpose of which was to document how instructional support services contribute to student learning and demonstrate the College's commitment to educational excellence.

The Institutional Effectiveness committee ("Mission Control") consists of the Chair ("Flight Director"), who is a faculty member jointly selected by the College President and the faculty senate (PCA) President; the Director of Institutional Research and Evaluation, who is an ex-officio non-voting member, the Executive Director of Campus Technologies, the Associate Vice President for Student Services, and Four (4) PCA members elected at-large of which two are faculty members. The Chair

coordinates the assessment process and meets with the Executive Vice President who administers institutional support for the support unit assessment and coordinates the linkage of this process with institutional planning and budgeting. One member of the committee is assigned to every unit as contact person and he or she is responsible for explaining the process of evaluation, the use of the forms, and is available for questions that may arise during the evaluation cycle. The contact person also collects annual reports from units assigned and provides guidance as needed in its preparation. Every instructional support unit fully participates in the development and implementation of institutional effectiveness assessment within its own unit and provides assistance in the preparation of the committee annual report.

Four areas were selected for evaluation for its maiden voyage in FY 1996: the Bookstore, Career Planning and Employment Services, the Staerkel Planetarium, and College/Community Relations. More units have been added annually with some of the more recent units added to the evaluation process being: College for Kids, Disability Services and Office of Women's Programs & Services followed by the Academic Development Center, Adult Degree Completion Center, Art Gallery, Student Services, Business Development Center, Dual Credit/Area Learning Center, Parkland Theater, and PCA (the faculty senate). As of November 2001, forty-three Parkland instructional support areas are evaluating their effectiveness and identifying needed improvements. The Institutional Effectiveness Committee provides an annual progress report to the faculty senate in the spring.

Another responsibility of the committee is to provide indicators for the college to use in their assessment and planning efforts. In 1996, the Institutional Effectiveness Committee consulted with the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) to adopt a set of *Performance Indicators*. The Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation and the Office of College Development compile and maintain these indicators. This document, published in even-numbered fiscal years (beginning in FY 2000), serves as a "control panel" for Committee members and the college to monitor progress at Parkland. Now contains over 15 student, 7 staff and 8 financial indicators, and is used by

administrators, department chairs, and the College Planning Committee in their strategic planning process.

“All Systems are Go!” . . .The Process

The purpose of the institutional effectiveness process is to provide a measure of how well Parkland’s instructional support units are achieving their stated goals and document how they contribute to the College’s mission and commitment to excellence. The Parkland model is based on the institutional effectiveness assessment format developed by Dr. James Nichols of Mississippi State University and Harriet Calhoun of Jefferson State Community College. Instructional support units are reviewed in a cycle that involves evaluating the goals of the unit with respect to the college’s *Mission and Purposes* statement, defining objectives, evaluating data, and applying the results of the evaluation to improve the service quality of the unit and support educational improvement. Figure 1 illustrates the process. Each unit develops its own mission statement, defines measurable goals, gathers data, evaluates outcomes, and uses the results for continuous improvement, with the support and guidance of the institutional effectiveness committee. The unit can then use the results of this process to plot a course to college’s institutional planning process, allowing for a data-driven commitment of resources.

Presently, there are 43 instructional support units involved in the assessment cycle. A current list of these support units may be found at: <http://www.parkland.cc.il.us/ic/units.html>. Eleven of these units have completed one cycle, three have completed two cycles and two have completed three cycles of the process. Among those 43 units is the college senate, the Parkland College Association, which just began its first cycle, and the means of assessment used are still under discussion.

There is evidence that instructional support units at Parkland are engaged in this institutional effectiveness process and understand the benefits they can get out of it. Every service unit completes an assessment record form with their objectives, assessments and analyses. An analysis of these reports shows that many units are regularly surveying their constituents to make sure that they are meeting their

objectives. For instance, from a point-of-contact survey conducted by the Assessment Center, it was found that examinees thought the printer in the testing room was distracting. In response to the survey feedback, the office space was rearranged and the printer was moved out of the testing room. Also, the Bookstore has responded to several faculty requests by increasing the number of cash registers from three to six and staggered the register lines to improve access.

Throughout the process, support units have access to the resources of the Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation to aid them in their evaluation initiatives. The Office provides support in several ways. One way is the Office works with units to help them define measurable goals, assist in the data collection efforts, and assist with outcome evaluation. Whenever possible, data collection efforts are coordinated to reduce the number of surveys students and staff are subjected to. Currently, there are three “college-wide” surveys administered: Student Satisfaction Survey, Student Climate Survey and Faculty/Staff/Administrator Climate Survey. These surveys are designed to collect importance and satisfaction data from representative samples of students and staff on education, services and campus environment. At present, there are 17 support units using the data from these campus-wide surveys. The Office also provides research methods support, advising units on ways to collect data, constructing surveys, data entry and analysis.

“The Eagle has Landed!” . . . Successful Missions

One of the instructional support units at Parkland College that have completed multiple evaluation cycles is the William M. Staerkel Planetarium. Some of the actions taken at the Planetarium, as a result of the institutional effectiveness assessment program, allow the staff to maintain their goal of contributing to the Parkland College community and the district at large, have been:

- To increase their advertising budget outlined in their operational plan that has increased attendance by school children (19%), public schools (20%), and light shows (51%) in FY 1999-2000.
- To devise a donor brochure to reflect the commitment by individuals and businesses to the planetarium.
- To implement a way in which they can reach the public using non-traditional advertising. Future goals include the completion of a funded comprehensive survey and also the acquisition of two corporate sponsors.
- To add a laptop computer so that instructors can more easily use the space for instruction.
- To develop and implement a survey of Parkland faculty who use the planetarium in their instruction to maximize service to Parkland students and to streamline the time reservation process.
- To develop and implement an equipment maintenance plan to prolong the lifetime of aging equipment.

The first action demonstrates how the results of these analyses can be used in Operational Planning.

Here, the Planetarium staff, based on institutional effectiveness results, made a decision to increase their advertising budget. These resources were allocated through Operational Planning.

Another example is the Bookstore. In order to support its mission of providing helpful assistance to students, faculty and staff in procurement of materials and resources necessary to achieve their educational goals the bookstore defined several objectives. For instance, the evaluation of the new “point of sale” computer system indicated that student waiting time was reduced from 45-60 minute wait at the busiest point of the first day in 1999-2000 to 15-20 minute wait in Fall 2001. Also, based on timed register receipts, the rate of handling students increased from 1 student per minute in 1999-2000 fall rush period to 3.1 students per minute in 2000-2001 fall rush period. The time to take inventory was reduced from 400 hours with a team of 10 in 1998-1999 to 80 hours with a team of 5 in 2000-2001. The

results of the computer system will continue to be monitored to increase the rate of handling students and therefore reduce more the student waiting time, and become more efficient in using time and human resources.

A final example of a successful assessment mission is in the Physical Plant-Custodial/Grounds area. The evaluation process in this unit is still in the first cycle but the staff have already made suggestions to improve service based on the analysis of data collected. Some of the improvements include:

- developing a Custodial Log and a training schedule in order to improve the training for new and current staff.
- Implementing a plan so that 100% of the staff are Certified Pesticide Applicators.
- Assessing custodial and groundskeeper functions separately.

“One Small Step” . . . Lessons Learned

As with any new process, adjustments have been made to improve its quality. One “lesson learned” was with the duration of the assessment cycle. The assessment cycle has been shortened from 3 years to 18 to 24 months with each area providing an annual progress report. Some of our groups operate on the academic calendar while others use the fiscal calendar. Several changes have also been implemented in the format of the forms used and the control of the process. For instance, a standard Assessment Planning Timeline has been adopted so the units can keep record of the stage they are at in the process. A very important improvement that facilitates the reporting system is the change of the Assessment Record forms, from a horizontal to a vertical format. The new format is welcomed and promises to reduce time spent in completing the reports. Examples of both forms, the Assessment Planning Timeline and the Assessment Record, as well as examples of the Annual Report form that instructional support units submit at the end of the academic year are available at the Institutional Effectiveness section of Parkland’s web page (<http://www.parkland.cc.il.us/ie>).

Another “small step” taken in the process is that it was realized that early assessment plans lacked criteria for success. Benchmarks must be instituted to know if you have reached the intended level of effectiveness. Units are now required to objectify goals and indicate success criteria and the new version of the assessment record contains an entry for success criteria. In many cases, the first assessment cycle is used to determine these baselines.

A third issue facing the committee is the addition of new support services offered to satisfy educational, cultural and training needs of the College. Organizational changes have made the process difficult to implement. Nine new units were added in the last six months. Some units were combined; others split. On several occasions, support units had to start their process over due to this restructuring. In other cases, a new director has been hired who brings with them a new set of goals. It is important to note that the faculty, staff and administrators who are working in the units drive Parkland College’s Institutional Effectiveness process. The unit must have ownership of the plan in order for the assessment, analysis, and program alterations to be genuine.

A final issue is that a stronger link needs to be made between the results of the assessment process and operational planning. Ideally, some of the assessment results can be used to request funds through the annual Operational Planning Process. However, few seem to use the process. A teaching model of the college planning process is currently in development to educate staff on the role of institutional effectiveness in planning and budgeting.

“One Giant Leap”... a Look to the Future

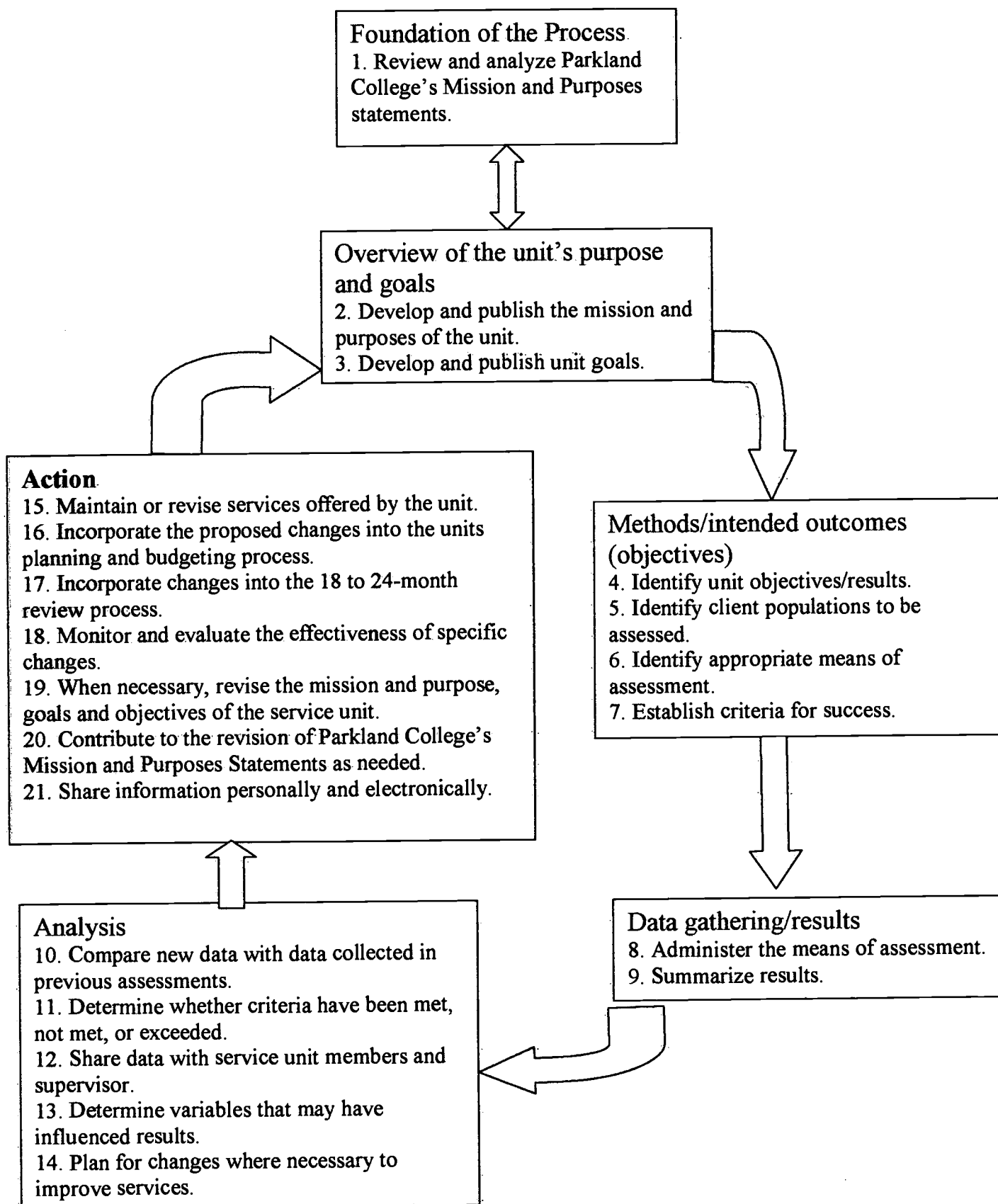
The assessment process itself is dynamic. As we move into 2002, there will undoubtedly be more adjustments as we move forward. This is the nature of the business. This year, the committee will tackle the Parkland College Faculty Senate, whose role on campus is to provide advice, counsel, and assistance to the President and to the Board of Trustees in order to promote and to develop the goals and philosophy of Parkland College. The Institutional Effectiveness Committee will serve as advisors and

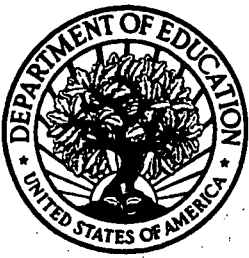
coordinators in this process. Currently, the Committee is examining data and determining the areas to be evaluated. Focus groups using an external moderator will be conducted using senate members and constituent groups.

The Committee is also preparing for another mission – evaluating the Operational Planning Process. Until now, the process has been evaluated informally, by making adjustments based on lessons learned. One of the charges to the Institutional Effectiveness Committee is to assess the college's Operational Planning Process. At present the Committee is researching evaluation models and determining a course of action.

A special thanks is given to the Chapter 16 committee of our self-study, chaired by Maria Zepeda, who provided information for this paper.

Figure 1 - Institutional Effectiveness Process





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