

The analysis of the operating system

The Operating System

The Office of International Programs (OIP) is the epicenter of all international activities on the UNCW campus. Most international concerns are funneled through the international office headed by the associate provost and chief international officer, Dr. Adrian Sherman. There are currently 431 UNCW students studying abroad and 120 international students studying at UNCW. The office front desk handles approximately 50 inquiries a day from customers with a very wide variety of issues concerning each of the three operational unit's objectives. The OIP also plans and executes programs such as Intercultural Week and the Hosts Family Program.

The OIP is a department within the division of academic affairs at UNCW, one of 16 campuses in the North Carolina public university system. OIP has a wide range of objectives centered on increasing the global nature of the UNCW campus. There are 17 people working in the office. Of which, the assistant provost director is the top authority among the OIP, supervising and leading five functional subsystems towards the mission and goal of the OIP. The five functional units within the OIP are: Business management, Study abroad, International Students and Services, English as a second language, and the administrative unit. Of five, Study abroad, International Students and Services, and English as a second language are mission operational units under the same level within the OIP. Their primary objectives are respectively to: assist students and faculty going abroad, assist faculty and students coming from abroad, and assist international students enhancing English speaking; while Business management and the administrative unit are supporting units within the OIP, facilitating the above three units to achieve the mission of the OIP. They are the integrate part of running the entire operating system well.

The customers for the OIP are just as varied as the mission and objectives. Prospective and current international students, prospective and current 'study abroad' students, as well as faculty going from or coming to UNCW use the OIP as an informational and administrative headquarters. Other customers include: faculty and staff from other UNCW departments with issues concerning an international student, sponsors and hosts of international programs, foreign universities and exchange program members, among others.

The mission of the OIP is: "To develop and increase the international dimension of the UNCW campus." The measure of this international dimension is the number of international exchanges happening at UNCW. The Director places a primary focus on meeting the needs of students and other customers of the office. OIP customer service is the face of UNCW to international institutions and students. A pleasant customer service experience there cascades to all other areas of relations.

What is the operating system like now?

We based our analysis on data collected during the first three weeks of March 2007. Several methods were used, interviews (face to face, via email, and by telephone); document analysis of the organizational chart, website, mission statement, and office manual (in development); observations of office operations over a period of three days and at different times of day and with different staff on duty; and a survey of the international students and scholars. Data gathered using these methods were used to draw conclusions about the present status of the system.

Objectives:

The objectives of the Office of International Programs are outlined in the mission statement. Relative to our problem, the most pertinent is "fostering programs and services for international students". This reflects the dual-purpose role of ISSS - programs and service, administrating international programs and providing comprehensive service to international service in all areas of campus life-before and during their stay. While based on interviews and observations, currently the stated objective are not being fully met due to some issues such as work overload with director (the only staff working in the ISSS), lack of effective assistance from the front desk, lack of clear-cut workflow and lack of teamwork spirit among the OIP.

Activities:

Customer service is a primary goal of the OIP. Customer service begins with interacting with the student workers at the front desk in four ways - by telephone, by email, by walk-in, and by the website (Standard mail is a fifth way but was not considered for this report). For the customers requesting assistance, some student workers ask for and understand what their query is first, and then direct them to the appropriate office for the proper response. A typical incident involves a student customer who wants to study abroad and walks in to the office. A student staff member (there are generally two on duty) asks for and understands her query. The customer is directed to the appropriate area (or subsystem) in the office - in this case a sign-in sheet for a "Study abroad initial info session"; while some student workers just ask who the customers are looking for regardless of what query they need help with, and then direct them to some full staff for response. This time the problems of service deficiency happens such as revisiting different staff, influencing the service progress of the staff, frustrating some staff, etc.

The student workers (SW) have a four-hour shift and usually work 20 hours a week. The full time staffs operate on a standard 40-hour workweek. On special occasions, all staffs are asked to work evenings and weekends. Interview with Directors shows that among the OIP some staffs are feeling overloaded; some staff members are not fulfilling their job duties. Some staffs don't know what is expected of them for their job; some staffs don't know their job responsibilities. Almost all staff work independently in OIP and don't care and have some responsibility of other staffs' work area. They are not clear about the entire workflow and don't know how and what to do in order to run the operating system smoothly. For example, if the director is out of town for business, then her service work will be discontinued without one alternate staff. This affects the normal operation of the system and results in the problems of service deficiency. There is no relevant system in place for recording customer service satisfaction data and for customers to offer feedback on a routine basis. There is no written job qualification checklist available for hiring the new full time staff. There are neither job aids nor job manuals available for staff reference. In addition, for the database that can enhance work efficiency and streamline the workflow among the OIP, most staff members don't know how to use it proficiently. There has been an attempt at a providing some training for the staff. During one-hour lunch break, the section managers trained the entire staff in its operations. The training session has not achieved desired effects without professional training process. For the customers, they don't know exactly which staff or office they should ask for help/assistance at all.

In general, the office does not have a performance goal mindset. Staff members are aware of problems and are willing to change. Even though the Office of International Programs is mentioned by name in the annual report, all staff members don't realize how their performance is measured. There is a feeling of 'work overload'. Because the mission is to increase service, and they currently feel at a maximum performance level, the staff is focused on improving overall efficiency and effectiveness for the office.

Side Effects:

An important side effect of the present activities was that to some extent almost all staffs are lack of knowledge and skills related to service area of OIP. This is evidenced in the present activities above. Among the OIP there is no formal training for staff in job tasks; there is no job qualification for staff; there is no job aids or job manual for staff reference. On the one hand, the staff has no chance to update their knowledge and skills professionally; on the other hand, the staffs have no pressure of performing their job well. Possessing relevant knowledge and skills is the necessity for the staff to serve the customers to achieve the mission of the OIP.

Another important side effect that was observed was that the full time staff and student staff lack of intrinsic work motivation. Without written feedback about service from customers, without job performance measurement mechanism among the OIP, and without clear-cut job responsibilities, it is very hard to drive the staffs to take full commitment to their job. To accomplish the mission of OIP, taking full commitment to job area is the first step for the staff to follow.

Resources:

The OIP has a budget, which is divided among the sub systems in the office. The office space, budget, and personnel are constrained by the Academic affairs department and divided among the 4 operational units at the discretion of the Director, who can apply for increases. During the course of this study, two changes in personnel were authorized. There are two computers and three phones available to the student staff in the front office. As indicated in interviews, changes in equipment and resources are not hard to achieve. For the small formal training, the budget can be solved within the OIP. For the formal training in the big range, the budget may be submitted to the academic affairs department for approval. Our change is in the small scope, and its budget can be solved by the OIP itself.

Constraints:

There are many fixed constraints in the OIP system. The policy of student workers' hours and pay as set by UNCW. Many other UNCW policies regulate and constrain the system. These policies and regulations range from who can update the OIP website to the physical location of the office. The federal laws regarding foreign national residence are another constraint of the system.

Management:

The chief international officer of UNCW, an assistant provost, manages the entire office and all units. The front office staffs report directly to the new office administrator position that reports to the director. Each of the other full time staff can ask the student staff for assistance. The student staff makes decisions concerning how and when to handle a situation and when to send the customer to a full time staff person, based on personal judgment.

The customers for the office are mostly study abroad students and there is a bias in that direction. Because training is done 'on the job', the staff learn to how to handle study abroad issues by observing others. However, International student's issues are neither discussed nor observed on the job.

What should the operating system be like?

Interview, survey and extant data analysis are the main methods to collect and analyze to determine

what might be out of line in the operating system and how it should run. Interviewing the key stakeholders of the system such as academic affairs, assistant provost and director of OIP, and the other directors of three areas of the OIP, is intended to identify what they are expecting of their organization and to ascertain how it should run to function well. Interviewing occurred throughout the project by phone and email contact. In addition, a customer service satisfaction survey for international students was designed and implemented to answer the question of "How satisfied the international students were with the OIP. We also analyzed extant data, such as OIP desk manual, web sites of other international programs of benchmark universities, in order to find out optimal of the operating system.

Optimal objectives

According to mission statement of the office of international programs, its main goal is to develop and increase the international dimension of the UNCW campus. This should be accomplished by fostering programs and services for international students and scholars, and for UNCW students and scholars studying abroad; developing and strengthening educational linkages with international partners; identifying and obtaining resources to further the internationalization of UNCW, and by enhancing and expanding international and global opportunities and resources on campus and in the surrounding community. Of which, fostering programs and services for international students and scholars is the primary objective the OIP expresses. The objective is well reflected in interviewing the key stakeholders and relevant documents. Others are regarded as secondary objectives of the primary objective. Once the primary objective is achieved, other affiliated objectives of the system are achieved one after another.

Optimal system activities

To accomplish the primary objective, a series of activities should be carried out accordingly. First, a long-term plan for recording and monitoring customer service data (input and output) on a routine basis is in place because it is an effective avenue for assessing customer satisfaction. Secondly, a written description about work area each staff is in charge of and job expectations/objectives of each staff is available for each staff. Thus, not only all assistants at the front office can introduce coming customers to who can serve best but also staff can determine which assistant at the front office she/he can request assistance on difference cases. Thirdly, each staff knows the entire workflow of the office and not just their specific area. This forms a powerful team with a smooth streamline of work tasks in OIP and maximizes work efficiency, particularly during peak times of each semester. Thus, cases are resolved regardless of staffing, and overloading does not occur. Fourthly, a relevant incentive/motivation mechanism functions within the OIP. This serves to increase confidence of all staff in related knowledge and skills and is a key step toward serving customers well. Fifthly, formal and informal training for keeping knowledge and skills related to job current is provided to improve work efficiency of all staff.

OIP is really expecting that every staff can have the knowledge and skills to use the service database software for international students in order to improve get individual job duties well done, effectively and efficiently. This database is developed to improve work efficiency of organizations serving international students in universities.

Optimal side effects

In an optimal system, the customers are satisfied with the highly efficient service provided by OIP. The good repute of the OIP will diffuse through the community via the customer's 'word of mouth'. This would

increase the enrollment of international students and scholars, the number of UNCW students and faculty studying abroad, the number of exchange programs and universities, which could accomplish the goal of OIP: develop and increase the international dimension of the UNCW campus. Likewise there would be lower stress in the office, less turn over in staff, and increased motivation.

Optimal management

In the optimal state, communication among departments would increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the OIP to achieve its mission goals. Management is systematic and has a plan in place for strategic planning and change. In addition to the above, each member of OIP should be considered to be an important and essential part of the system and other individuals to diffuse and implement team spirit completely in the system. The system should be organized and managed in the systematic way to accomplish the goal of the system.