Standard 4: Systemic Improvement

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Introduction

Managing the educational needs of an institution can be a daunting task for any administrators. The leadership skills needed to improve and move the institution forward in this digital-age, can be even more challenging if the individuals leading are not willing to learn new methods and continuously think about how effective use of technology brings about useful information to students. Standard 4 discusses the leadership needed to improve the organization through effective use of information and technology resources. Elmore, Burney, and Pittsburgh University (1997) suggests that this type of systemic improvement can occur with significant gains in student performance. Organizations can be successful by focusing on the fundamentals of teaching and learning in a sustained way over time.

Performance Indicators

Standard 4 has five indicators discussing ways to lead purposeful change, collaborate to improve staff performance and student learning, recruit and retain competent personnel, establish partnerships, and maintain a robust technological infrastructure. The combination of these indicators represent procedure that should be a fundamental part of any educational unit's yearly operation. The computing sciences (CS) department is more successful in this standard than the previous three standards since technology, recruitment, and collaboration are areas for which individuals in the department embrace.

Indicator 1

This first indicator's focus is on the appropriate use of technology and media-rich resources to lead purposeful change. If done correctly, an educational unit will meet learning goals. The CS department is successful in this area because it supports individuals in their

suggestions to change and/or implement new technology to the benefit of students. The

department leaders are also faculty and model digital-age leadership in their own classes.

Collectively, the members of the department are in agreement with technological changes as long

as they benefit the students and do not invalidate accreditation standards.

Several faculty members are researching the area of big data where they analyze the

collection of various data. There is a lab that provides infrastructure for both faculty and students

to perform research. This is a good planning area for the CS department because it would allow

leaders to review areas of success and failure when making technology changes. In doing so,

administrators can focus more on effective use of information and technology resources and

improve benefit to students. Faculty who are not conducting research are neither for nor against

the use of this collection and analysis of data. The primary issue is who would handle the task of

collection and reporting information. Given the amount of support for technology changes in the

CS department, I believe there can be complete success with standard four, as it pertains to this

indicator, if the leaders would implement policy and procedure to review technology changes

and technology use in the classroom.

Indicator 2

This second indicator focus is on the collaborative effort to collect data and share results

with the learning community, with the idea of improving staff performance and student learning.

As I mentioned previously when discussing indicator 1, although members of the CS department

would not be against this collection of data, there is no current collection or analysis of data as it

pertains to technology infusion in the classroom or new infrastructure. The main hindrance to

this type of process is the availability of personnel to be responsible for the collection, analysis,

and reporting. The knowledge on how to establish metrics exists as well as the technology

infrastructure, so this should be a focus area for the CS department in order to be successful with standard 4 as it pertains to indicator two.

Indicator 3

This third indicator addresses the recruitment and retention of qualified personnel who can and would use technology effectively to benefit the organization and improve student learning. The CS department does have a detailed process for recruiting potential candidates to join faculty and staff. The desire to find a 'perfect' fit, at times leaves open teaching slots in the department's roster. For instance, one candidate seemed ideal given their knowledge of content for an IT slot in the department; however, as the interview process progressed, it was determined that the candidate deemed his/her self 'old fashioned' and 'practical' (IT search committee, March 2018). They were not 'big' on technology in the classroom. The CS department embraces new technology and believes it is necessary to engage students.

Indicator 4

This fourth indicator looks for strategic partnerships and the ability to use those relationships to support systemic improvement. This is the one area for which the CS department has no policy, procedure, or discussion. Industry partners are beacons into the characteristics of career for the department's product…students. Without some insight into what industry wants or needs for those newly entering the workforce, there is no way to prepare students to 'hit the ground running' when the opportunity arises. I believe this to be especially so in the digital-age.

Establishing, cultivating, and leveraging strategic partnerships not only provide insight into what industry wants, it also shines a light onto the department, allowing industry to know the department's accomplishments. I believe this two-way insight can lead to more relationships

and even monetary gain for the department (even if just research opportunities and summer faculty positions). Also, establishing these relationships and producing good product (students) will give the industry partners a 'go to' spot to hire, possibly reducing their recruitment efforts and saving them money for which they can direct toward new-entry salaries (ideally, I know).

Indicator 5

This final indicator looks at the infrastructure for technology, how well it is integrated into the learning community, and how well it is maintained and supported. The CS department has its own high-end computing lab that is 'off the grid', if you will. This lab is primarily for research and special projects, so the desire of those in the department who support it is to not be slowed down by the red-tape that surrounds installing technology and software. This lab, however, is not conducive to the general classroom or teaching lab, as it is a closed network.

The technology used in the classroom is maintained by the university's information technology services (ITS) department. There is more than enough policy in place that the department must follow in order to use technology in the classroom (sometimes to the detriment of faculty and students). However, technology is mostly operable when it is needed. There is a request period for which we can ask for new technology and software to be implemented and/or installed in the classroom. It is also easy to contact and receive help when equipment fails.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the CS department is mostly successful as it pertains to standard four. The administrators provide digital-age leadership and management through support of members of the department in their individual and collaborative efforts. This approach allows for systemic improvement since members of the department look for a variety of ways to improve technology

use in the classroom to improve student learning. Also, administrators suggest collaboration

between members of the department in searching for new technology and new ways to use

technology effectively in the classroom. Department leaders are not afraid of change and are

willing to try new technology, especially if for the benefit of students. Administrators also recruit

highly competent personnel in an effort to keep technology 'fresh' in the classroom.

Establishing strategic partnerships is an area for improvement for the department. The

discussion needs to start concerning the importance of having strategic partners, discovering who

those partners might be, and how to develop the relationship. This is a major benefit area for

students, faculty, and the department. Another area for improvement is data collection as it

pertains to successful use of technology in the classroom, as well as faculty/staff performance

when using technology to further the goals of the department.

References

Elmore, R. F., Burney, D., & Pittsburgh Univ., P. C. (1997). School Variation and Systemic

Instructional Improvement in Community School District #2, New York City. *High

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