

Executive Summary

The Customer Service Task Force (Task Force) was formed for the purpose of evaluating internal customer service practices throughout York College (York) and recommending specific, informed changes and ideas across a variety of areas over a defined period of time that will enhance the overall student experience. As a result of these efforts, the Task Force is pleased to present several of its recommendations for the College organized by immediate, mid and long-term timeframes.

Immediate

- Customer Service Training - Contract with a third party consultant to provide annual customer service training to York staff and develop a York Customer Service handbook.
- Implement "Google Analysis" in all offices that interact with students. This free software logs students arrival time to an office, student demographics, the concern or issue, the time out and also allows for student feedback.
- Require the use of an "Encounter Form" to facilitate student interaction between offices
- Select a York College credo (suggestions included below)
- Advisement to start earlier (Summer and Fall in March; Winter and Spring in October). Student planning essential, Advisement will send email to students reminding students to complete enrollment process.
- Encourage, via marketing campaign, Student Responsibilities around reading email, monitoring CUNYfirst, abiding by deadlines for submissions, becoming familiar with DegreeWorks, courtesy and respect, etc.
- Require name tags in offices where students interact with staff. Primarily those staff at the "front desk" or window
- When possible customer service area office doors to be kept open unless discussing confidential matters
- Require use of York college email by faculty, staff and students for all College communications and College business
- Create a standing Customer Service Committee that will monitor progress of implementation, add new processes as needed, field concerns
- Investigate and attempt to resolve the issue of student audits that lead to the loss of financial aid

Mid-Term

- Develop an annual on-line customer service course for current and new employees
- Students should receive their York College email account upon payment of commitment fees to facilitate early communication

- Initiate a mandatory Student Orientation Course (SD110) for all incoming students to help acclimate to York College policies and procedures, including training on CUNYfirst, DegreeWorks, FACTS, etc.
- Expand and make mandatory a faculty training course (Prof 101) for all faculty to help acclimate to York College policies and procedures, including training on CUNYfirst, advisement, DegreeWorks, FACTS, etc.
- Investigate the implementation of a "Centralized Customer Communication" (CCC) program in CUNYfirst whereby interactions between staff and students are entered in order for there to be a permanent record enabling staff to share that information within that office and other student service offices.
- Develop a standard logo and format for College communications and emails
- Provide staff training on CUNYfirst and other specialized departmental software annually
- Develop and distribute annual Customer Service Survey for students, faculty and staff soliciting suggestions for improvement, work/study environment, cafeteria, etc.
- Student Development should develop a campaign to highlight the campus calendar and events listing website with more information on plasma screens and elsewhere.
- Student Development should develop a campaign to read emails and use the York College email

Long-Term

- Ensure all York departmental websites, particularly those that interact with students are up to date and include office P&Ps, deadline and due date information, expectations for results if all is completed appropriately, tools. Communication is the key.

The full list of recommendations is included on the Customer Task Force Recommendation spreadsheet that accompanies this report.

Customer Service Task Force Recommendations and Implementation

Purpose

The Customer Service Task Force (Task Force) was formed for the purpose of evaluating internal customer service practices throughout the York College (York) campus and recommending specific, informed changes and ideas across a variety of areas over a defined period of time that will enhance the overall student experience. The Task Force members were chosen from a cross section of the college community and included faculty, staff, administrators and student advocates. The task force met almost weekly for four months, researching best practices, reviewing Noel Levitz data, taking note of experiential concerns and discussing practices that currently result in positive feedback.

As a result of these efforts, the Task Force is pleased to present its recommendations for the College overall along with a preliminary implementation plan that addresses major customer service concerns from both a student and staff perspective, over immediate, mid-term and long term time frames with estimated required resources both in terms of funding and personnel.

Methodology

The Customer Service Task Force initiated the conversation of customer service at York using the 3 years of accumulated data from the Noel Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory (NL SSI). The NL SSI is a student survey designed to measure student satisfaction across a number of categories (scale items). Categories include:

- Recruitment and Financial Aid
- Registration Effectiveness
- Concern for Individual
- Service Excellence
- Campus Climate
- Student Centeredness
- Instructional Effectiveness
- Academic Advising
- Campus Support Services
- Campus Life/Responsiveness to Diverse Populations
- Safety and Security

The Office of Institutional Research (OIR) has been administering and collecting data on the NL SSI for the past 3 years (2013, 2014, and 2015). The survey, intended to supplement the existing CUNY Student Experience Survey (SES), was initiated as part of the CUNY Performance Management Process in 2013 to be administered in alternating years with SES. In order to gain a better analysis of the trend in student satisfaction, York decided to administer the NL SSI again in 2014 and, therefore has a three year trend available.

The NL SSI asks questions to determine the importance of issues to students as well as the student satisfaction with the same issue. Therefore, each question is responded to twice and a “gap” is reported between expectations and perception. GAPS of 1.8 and above are considered high or major concerns for the responder.

The Task Force focused on areas of concern that had GAPS of 1.8 above. Additionally, the Task Force reviewed the highest area of concern in each category to provide suggestions for improvement across the campus.

Best Practices

The **Education Advisory Board’s** Student Affairs Forum on “Improving Customer Service Delivery for Students” summarizes best practices nationally. The following is an outline of the Board’s recommendations for improving custom service and our recommendations (*italicized*) to address them:

Create a one-stop shop for student inquiries about financial aid, admissions, course registration, and student accounts to simplify and improve student interactions. A centralized website, phone line, or physical office streamlines inquiry intake and automatizes responses for most frequent questions. A team of administrative staff support the system on the back-end to resolve unanswered, complex, or personal inquiries. *The Academic Village will address this suggestion in the future, moving offices closer together will address this in near future.*

Enhance academic and professional advising during orientation and throughout freshman year to increase student satisfaction and retention. Lack of long-term planning and academic guidance are recurrent student complaints and leading causes of dropout. Institutions restructure orientation programs to include short student-advisor discussions, and create mandatory processes to continue the advising throughout a student’s career. *The Task Force has recommended several items related to additional and more comprehensive Advisement.*

Train staff at specific administrative offices to become generalists who can answer questions about all offices' functions. Technological solutions and the automation of previously manual tasks (e.g., data collection, document processing, and message delivery) reduces the workload of administrative officers. Administrators move personnel from specialized roles at administrative offices to the centralized answer center or to advising roles. Unit directors conduct office cross-training to prepare staff for new roles. *The Task Force has recommended the creation super users who can take on this role.*

Create specific training modules that prepare staff to deliver negative feedback and respond to antagonistic students. Bad news regarding admissions or financial aid cause the most difficulty in customer service delivery. Contacts train staff to empathize with the student, offer solutions, and reduce tension. Role play is especially effective training. *The Task Force has recommended the use of an outside consultant to provide training and/or develop an online training module.*

Outcomes are a key priority and motivation for consumer service initiatives but profiled institutions lack effective mechanism to assess the impact of their efforts. Correlation between customer service initiatives and retention is difficult to prove. Instead, contacts utilize indirect evaluation mechanisms: student surveys, focus groups, recording of interactions, annual polls, and staff performance reviews. Preliminary results in these evaluation mechanisms are positive: after the implementation of initiatives students report higher satisfaction, administrators handle less paperwork and fewer in-person inquiries, and staff feel more empowered.

Also, please find below, additional suggestions for improving customer service at York College:

According to Wikipedia, customer service is the provision of service to customers before, during and after the service. An important aspect of its success is dependent on employees “who can adjust themselves to the personality of the guest.” With this in mind let’s examine “**The Ten Commandments of Customer Service**” and determine how we may be able to use them to improve our services at the College.

1. **Know who is boss** – we are in business to service customer needs – we can only do that if we know what the customers want - when you truly listen to your customers, they let you know what they want
2. **Be a good listener** - take the time to identify customer needs by asking questions and concentrating on what the customer is really saying
3. **Identify and anticipate needs** - customers don't buy products or services, they buy good feelings and solutions to problems. Most customer needs are emotional rather than

logical and the more you know your customers, the better you become at anticipating their needs.

4. **Make customers feel important and appreciated** - treat them as individuals. Always use their name and find ways to compliment them, but be sincere
5. **Help customers understand your systems** - take time to explain how your systems work and how they simplify transactions – use technology – TV monitors at office entrances to disseminate important information relating to office procedures, deadlines, program guidelines, etc.
6. **Appreciate the power of "Yes"** - always look for ways to help your customers. When they have a request (as long as it is reasonable) tell them that you can do it. Figure out how afterwards. Look for ways to make doing business with you easy. Always do what you say you are going to do.
7. **Know how to apologize** - when something goes wrong, apologize. It's easy and customers like it. The customer may not always be right, but the customer must always win. Deal with problems immediately and let customers know what you have done. Make it simple for customers to complain. Value their complaints. As much as we dislike it, it gives us an opportunity to improve
8. **Give more than expected** - Since the future of all companies lies in keeping customers happy, think of ways to elevate yourself above the competition
9. **Get regular feedback** - Encourage and welcome suggestions about how you could improve; use student surveys.
10. **Treat employees well** - Employees are your internal customers and need a regular dose of appreciation. Thank them and find ways to let them know how important they are. Treat your employees with respect and chances are they will have a higher regard for customers. Develop "Employee of the Month" recognition programs

York Customer Service Strategy - CARES

The Task Force would like to embark on a Customer Service Campaign across the York campus. The "CARES" campaign would work to encourage staff to use the following techniques when dealing with students and staff alike.

- **Communicate** – provide customers with information/policies in advance and often. Give them the tools and information to do what is needed on their own (e.g., provide training, Help Workshops, maintain website, send News Blasts)
- **Address concerns** - meet with customers, answer phones, update customers timely regarding the status of any concerns

- **Respond to issues**- be proactive and help solve problems when they are presented as opposed to sending them to other offices (use the Hotline). Respond to emails in a timely fashion (24 hours) and again on date of deliverable
- **Examine internal procedures** – be open and interested in making improvements that will help the overall process and ultimately the customer
- **Smile** – courtesy is contagious. Remember, students are our customers

When handling complaints - **CARP**:

- **Control** the situation
- **Acknowledge** the concern
- **Refocus** the conversation
- **Problem-solve**

The campaign would be executed via the use of presentations, pamphlets, posters and shown on the plasma screens throughout the York campus.

York College CREDO

The Task Force had also been asked to review and suggest a possible credo for the College. Credo, as defined by Merriam-Webster is:

- *an idea or set of beliefs that guides the actions of a person or group*

Below are the top 4 credo suggestions:

- **York: Communicate, Educate, Graduate**
- **YOUR Success is YORK's Success**
- **York College, Enriching Lives**
- **York College: Education, Professionalism and Respect**

Results

After significant review and discussion and in consideration of available resources, the college mission, best practices at other public and private institutions, the Task Force prepared recommendations by survey category as well as overall customer recommendations for York College. (See spreadsheet attached)

Each of the recommendations has an estimated time frame for implementation, resources required and a mode of measurement through the use of annual surveys, encounter software, and the continued use of the Noel Levitz survey.

Implementation

The Task Force recommendations will be reviewed by the President. Once final recommendations are selected and approved, a specific implementation for each recommendation will be prepared that will include staff involved, timing for completion and where known funding resources required.

At that time, the implementation could take place using one or a combination of the following options:

Option 1:

Implementation of the recommendations will be led by the current Customer Service Task Force or a portion therein.

Option 2:

Implementation of the recommendations will be led by a person(s) of a newly-formed committee designated by the President and given authority to execute the plan.

Option 3:

Directors of each area affected by the Task Force's recommendations can be charged with overseeing the implementation for their area and reporting results directly to President or back to the Task Force.

Option 4:

An outside consultant could be retained to implement recommendations across York.

Summary

Customer Service is a highly-prized goal of all service institutions. Organizations that meet this goal can likely improve the experience of the user, the reputation of the organization, the work environment for the staff and the retention and enrollment rates of its student.

By implementing one, several or any number of the recommendations made herein, it is the Task Force's belief that York College and its students will benefit substantially and a positive impact throughout the campus will be observed.