

KAIZEN RESULTS

Higher education meets higher levels of efficiency:

Regents team overhauls key process to quicken turnaround and ensure quality

IN BRIEF: In their role of ensuring the quality of academic programs in higher education, staff at the Ohio Board of Regents saw an opportunity. The academic program-approval process had become complex and time-consuming – frustrating for institutions that were seeking initial authorization and licensure approval for their programs, and exhausting for staff who were pulled in many different directions. Staff knew there was big room for improvement, so they formed a team and applied the tools and techniques of Kaizen – going on to develop a simpler and better process that represents true transformational change.

KEY MEASURES	BASELINE	PROJECTIONS	
	Key measures of the process, gathered prior to Kaizen event	Projected measures after all improvements are in place	PROJECTED CHANGE
Process Steps	175	62	65% reduction
Number of Handoffs	76	25	67% reduction
Decision Points	9	5	43% reduction
Overall Process Time	12-20 months	9 months	3-11 months

EFFICIENCY IN ACTION: The new process is designed to have 65% fewer steps (from 175 to 62), 67% fewer handoffs (from 76 to 25), and 44% fewer decision points (from 9 to 5). *See the chart on the left.*

BETTER FOR THE CUSTOMER: The team estimates that the new process, when fully implemented, will take an average of 9 months from inquiry to decision, compared to the typical time frame of 12-20 months.

SMART USE OF TIME: The team calculated that the amount of saved staff time from these efficiency gains will have a wage equivalent of \$2,500 per review. Staff conducted 134 of these reviews during the 26 months preceding the Kaizen event. Going forward, freed-up staff time will be redirected to other, higher-value work.

ENSURING HIGH STANDARDS: The new approach maintains and potentially strengthens the ability of staff to meet high program-quality standards. As an example, a planned centralized filing system will give staff faster access to comprehensive historical information regarding institutions.

DETAILS

When it comes to the quality of education at Ohio's colleges and universities, the Ohio Board of Regents fills a vital role. One of its many responsibilities is to ensure quality academic programs – by applying rigorous standards to new private or out-of-state institutions that want to bring their programs to Ohio schools. Only after submitting a proposal, going through a full review process, and meeting all standards can an institution gain the required authorization and licenses.

Staff at the Board of Regents have always been passionate about their role as guardian of program quality. But they knew as well as anyone that the program approval process had become problematic.

For institutions, it was taking anywhere from 4 to 7 months to go from official inquiry to proposal submission – and then another 8 to 13 months from proposal submission to review completion and then a decision on authorization. Some applicants were waiting up to 20 months to get final word.

For staff, each proposal submission was taking 425-507 hours of work time. The process was feeling like a combination marathon and obstacle course. As one staff member described it: "We are constantly running, constantly out of the office on reviews. When we're in the office, we are pulled in so many different directions."



Team members: Corey Posey, Consultant, AQA Educator Prep.; Stephanie Davidson, Vice Chancellor; Tom Bordenkircher, Associate Vice Chancellor; Shane DeGarmo, Director, Private & OOS institutions; Cathy Hill, Assistant Director, 2-year institutions; Sheryl Hansen, Director, AQA Educator Prep; Char Rogge, Administrator, Graduate programs; Jane Fullerton, Consultant, Academic Affairs UG programs; Daia Hatchett-Jackson, Admin. Assistant, Program Review; Carlos Bing, Asst. Director, GEAR UP program review; Robert Burke, AICUO, Director of Research; Cheryl Lyman, Ohio School Facilities Commission.

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Go to lean.ohio.gov to download this report, view the team's report-out visuals, see more photos, and read about other Kaizen teams and their results. Please note: This report was published on March 16, 2012. Projected and actual results may have changed since then. Contact LeanOhio or a team contact for the latest information.

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Determined to ensure high program quality while increasing efficiency, staff embarked on a Kaizen event – a week of nonstop work aimed at bringing major improvement to the program approval process. “We went into this with the main goal of reducing the burden on institutions and staff while maintaining the integrity of our work,” the staff member said.

They emerged with a set of plans and projections that should make everyone happy. Ultimately, when the full package of improvements is implemented, the new process will have 65% fewer steps (from 175 to 62), 67% fewer handoffs (from 76 to 25), and 44% fewer decision points (from 9 to 5). For institutions, the original process time of 12-20 months should become a thing of the past, with the new process averaging 9 months. Best of all, this faster approach will maintain the high program-quality standard that has always guided the program approval staff.

The team predicts that when all the efficiencies are in place, a significant amount of staff time will be freed up – to be redeployed to higher-value work activities. As a part of its analysis, the team calculated that the amount of saved time has a wage equivalent of \$2,500 per review. Staff conducted 134 of these reviews (i.e., reviews of new degree programs from in-state private schools, out-of-state public and private schools, and for-profit institutions) during the 26 months preceding the Kaizen event.

What are the changes that will drive these projected results?

For one, there will be a single pathway for institutions to follow, starting with a to-be-developed Web-based centralized intake system with one clear point of entry. This will prevent any confusion among submitting institutions, and it will sharply reduce the number of question-filled phone calls that have become commonplace. What’s more, the institution’s electronic contact at the start of the process will put essential information into the system without requiring separate data entry by staff, and it will allow for automated response and tracking.

Another change is designed to ensure that early incoming info from institutions is accurate. An “initial inquiry survey” is being developed to convey Ohio’s standards, so institutions that want to offer degree programs or licenses will be crystal clear on how Ohio does it. This is aimed mostly at out-of-state institutions; it prompts them to check and compare their own state’s standards to Ohio’s, so they understand the similarities and differences.

Improvements also call for the assignment of a lead “consultant/mentor” for each incoming proposal. This person would ensure the completeness of incoming information from an institution, as a way of preventing loopbacks and rework later in the process. The mentor would work with the institution all the way through to a decision, serving as a single point of contact at every stage.

Yet another improvement has to do with information management. Up to now, staff have lacked easy access to historical information from

institutions that have contacted the Board of Regents before, mainly because it’s decentralized in various locations and formats, including hard-copy files. The new system will be built around centralized filing. Staff will have a single electronic location where they can access all archived info. So work that has been done before (such as data entry) won’t be redone, and a record of all previous contacts with a given institution will be at staff members’ fingertips.

Many other pending improvements are included in the team’s implementation plans. Some lend themselves to quick implementation (adding a signature block to the background piece early in the process, changing the “Letter of Intent” to a “Letter of Commitment” to ensure that applying institutions are serious about doing business with Ohio, etc.) while other actions will be more involved (streamlining communication with institutions and among staff, completing the report on site, improving the mentor/consultant training process, etc.)

The team described all of its improvement ideas and projected results at an end-of-week Kaizen presentation attended by Board of Regents colleagues and people from other state agencies. All of the team members spoke, including Cheryl Lyman of the Ohio School Facilities Commission. Her external perspective gave added weight to her complimentary words: “As a taxpayer, I just want to say what a fabulous team you are, with your professionalism and the support you gave each other.”

Char Rogge, Administrator of Graduate Programs, described the Kaizen event as “an intense week, but there were so many benefits. Having an entire week to focus on this process is a priceless gift. It’s all about the customers – that’s really the bottom line.” ●



With the Statehouse in the background, Kaizen team members make decisions on how they will improve the program-review process.

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