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**OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE INITIATIVE FOR  
IMPROVING STUDENT SERVICES:  
UNIVERSITY'S CUSTOMER FOCUS FOR THE 21ST  
CENTURY (UCF-21)  
Phase 1**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

This proposal addresses the need to take a systems level view of various student-related functions at the University of Central Florida in order to perform a more systematic and systemic analysis of student services and develop recommended changes or additions with the intended outcomes of improving the delivery of student services and increasing student satisfaction with those services. UCF is a growing metropolitan university that serves a large and diverse student body, having grown beyond 27,000 students in the past thirty years. Some of these students are traditional full-time undergraduates who live in university residence halls, while others are part-time students who work full-time jobs and take evening or videotaped classes at remote locations. The explosive growth in student enrollment has been accompanied by different needs that the various types of students have at different times in their education at UCF. To achieve operational excellence and be a model for metropolitan universities, UCF must reexamine the various systems that drive and support student services. The customer focus on students that must underlie this review for the future of UCF is the driving force for this project: **University's Customer Focus for the 21st Century (UCF-21)**.

President Hitt, in the recently completed UCF Strategic Plan, *Charting the Course 1996-2001*, identified "achieve operational excellence" as one of the four strategic directions for the university. The plan emphasized that the University of Central Florida continues to experience rapid growth and a significant annual increase in the number of students to be served on campus. There are continuing changes in procedures that have been or will be implemented throughout the campus to attempt to serve this increasing student population effectively, and the strategic plan calls for further improvements. The "Cycles" survey and other surveys indicate a high level of student satisfaction with most academic issues, but the survey results show lower levels of satisfaction with areas generally classified as "student services." Anecdotal information from students, faculty, and staff suggest that there are continuing problems with financial aid and the practice of registration "holds."

In 1992, the University established the Office of Quality Management (now Quality Initiatives) as an initial effort to help assess administrative processes and work with the "process owners" to improve their processes. The fundamental idea of "continuous improvement" has provided the foundation for these efforts. Since its founding, the office has worked with numerous groups,

generally at the direct provider level, to develop methods for process improvement. However, it has become clear that some of the remaining problems will require some facilitation at higher levels and require a broader systems perspective that spans across various functions within UCF.

Recognizing that need, during the Fall 1996 semester, the Provost convened a Student Services Improvement Team chaired by an Assistant Vice-President for Academic Affairs and charged the team with the task of looking at ways for improving, coordinating, and fostering cooperation in UCF's student services areas. The team, consisting of members from the major student services areas, identified seven areas that it believes should be addressed in order to improve services to students. These areas include:

- Academic Advising,
- Academic Advising Staffing,
- Non-Curricular Information,
- Orientation Improvement,
- Student Financial Assistance Staffing,
- Student Holds, and
- Student Services Staffing.

The SSIT recommended that several areas be selected from this list for the initial effort and teams be formed in each area to conduct the assessment. During the process used to identify and develop the seven issues listed above, the SSIT developed an extensive list of issues that involve all aspects of student life. Addressing those issues is left to future teams. Recently, the Provost met with the Vice-Presidents and it was decided to proceed with teams for Non-Curricular Information, Academic Advising, and Student Holds. These three areas cross different organizational functions. It is anticipated that the proposed UCF-21 project team will interact with these improvement teams, and that the Office of Quality Initiatives will be available to those teams to provide guidance on approaches that can be used.

The teams, consisting of members from various organizational functions, will be able to identify opportunities for improvement in the different areas, but they may not be able to integrate the solutions and affect the process owner. There is a clear need for a systems view in each area, but the teams will be somewhat ad hoc in nature (because the system that each team will be addressing was not analyzed prior to the determination of the composition of the teams, it is likely that some important aspects of the overall process have been missed) and will be conducting their assessments in addition to their normal duties. They therefore may not have the broad systems perspective in order to solve the problems. It is clear that the members of the three teams will have a lot of knowledge about their processes and their knowledge will be invaluable input into finding workable solutions.

The above approach and the three improvement teams are approaching the problems from a bottom up perspective. This approach has a benefit of enhancing communication and understanding across the organizational functions as members of each team attempt to find improvements to the processes that they own. However, this bottom up approach will likely be ineffective in identifying and addressing more systemic issues where there are multiple and interdependent process owners. The Provost has expressed a desire to have another effort that examines student services from a global systems perspective. This proposal responds to that request.

## **2.0 OBJECTIVE**

The objective of the UCF-21 Operational Excellence Initiative is to develop a solid understanding of all aspects of student services, identify systems level opportunities for improving the delivery of

student services including the possibility of reengineering the student services system, recommend changes, and develop appropriate implementation plans to effect those changes. It is expected that this initiative will be a multi-year effort. This proposal addresses the initial effort for the 1997-1998 Academic Year (Phase 1). The Phase 1 objective is to clearly and comprehensively define and identify student services, identify and document all critical student services processes and their interrelationships, review all previous assessments of student services and conduct additional assessments as necessary, and develop an implementation plan for conducting detailed analyses of critical student service areas in order to develop and implement improved processes in Phase 2. In addition, implementation recommendations will be developed in Phase 1 for any immediate changes that will improve student services that can be made without further analysis.

### **3.0 STATEMENT OF WORK**

“Student Services” appears to be a catch-all term that includes everything that is not directly involving a classroom/course, including for example admissions, registration, advising, financial aid, housing, food services, health services, job placement, internships. Any analysis of student services requires a clarification and refinement of that concept. At the outset, it is recognized that the term “student services” as currently used really includes two different dimensions: (1) services that the students want (e.g., financial aid, housing, food, courses, parking), and (2) administrative requirements and procedures (disingenuously termed “services”) that the university imposes on the students (e.g., registration process, financial aid process, parking tickets). Students will typically want more of the former and less of the latter--more product and less bureaucracy. Students want to take classes and the University imposes a registration process/procedure on the students. When that registration process becomes cumbersome or inconsistently applied, then students view this “service” to be inadequate. These two dimensions will be refined and used as a frame of reference for the assessment of student services. Additionally, these services may be applied directly and be recognized by students, or they may have indirect effects on students (e.g., mail system delays may ultimately delay processing of applications or student refunds, but students will not recognize the mail system as the source of the problem).

It is also clear at the outset that the information and service requirements will be different for students depending on their “state,” their “source,” their “type,” and their “stage” of education. For example, student service requirements will be different for pre-UCF students (potential applicants), first time (new) UCF students, continuing students, reentering students, graduating students, and alumni. For each of those states, service requirements may be different depending on whether the source of the student is directly from high school, transfer from a community college, or transfer from another four-year university/college. Similar differences will depend on the type of student such as international, honors, college/degree program, minority, disabilities, full-time, part-time. Finally, services will vary based on the stage of the student’s education such as undergraduate v. graduate v. professional development, or continuing v. reentering. The assessment will be sensitive to these differences and will refine and clarify these groupings to establish clear dimensions for the analysis.

With this foundation, the following task structure provides the means to accomplish the Phase 1 objective.

#### **3.1 Develop an Awareness of the UCF-21 Operational Excellence Initiative.**

The intended outcome of the UCF-21 Operational Excellence Initiative is to increase student satisfaction with student services. Students perceptions can be affected in many ways and it is important that the university community be made aware that the Administration is doing

something to enhance their services and that students are welcome to participate in the process. In addition, it is important to provide a high level of visibility for “success stories.” In order to accomplish this, we will develop and maintain an effective means of communication with the university community to ensure that they are aware of the UCF-21 Operational Excellence Initiative and its accomplishments, and that they have an easy means to provide input to the project. Additionally, we will ensure that the Provost and appropriate departments are aware of the progress of the analyses through periodic progress reviews.

### **3.2 Define and Identify Current Student Services and Processes.**

We will review existing administrative structures for student services in order to develop a characterization of the different types of services provided and administrative procedures and requirements imposed on students. We will also develop a refined categorization of student groupings (state, source, type, and stage) to clarify the types of services required.

### **3.3 Develop Initial Systems Characterization of Current Student Services and Processes.**

We will develop a comprehensive description of the existing system of “student services” using the results of Task 3.2 and discussions with heads of various organizational functions.

### **3.4 Document Current Student Services Processes.**

Using direct observation and interviews with students, faculty, and staff, we will develop an understanding of and document the existing student services processes, including current policies, procedures and traditions, information requirements, staffing levels, technology availability, training support, and other factors that affect the delivery of the services. We will place project personnel in service areas where appropriate to facilitate process understanding and data collection.

### **3.5 Assessment of Current Student Services and Processes.**

We will perform a comprehensive review of existing surveys of student services to determine if existing service levels and quality of service are satisfactory. An initial cursory review of some of these surveys indicates that the surveys may not be at the level of detail required to identify the real sources/reasons for student dissatisfaction in some of the student services. Appropriate approaches will be developed that can be used to obtain additional and more reliable information on the state of current services and students’ perceptions of those services (e.g., work sampling, system testers, focus groups, surveys). We will pilot test the encouraging approaches in selected areas. In addition, we will conduct additional assessments to identify what services are not yet provided, but are needed by students. This will include benchmarking with other SUS institutions.

### **3.6 Identify Obvious Immediate Process Improvement Opportunities.**

Based on the analyses in Tasks 3.4 and 3.5, we will review all processes to determine if and where opportunities exist for immediate and obvious improvement. We will document any process changes and improvements that occurred during the course of the process analysis.

### **3.7 Develop Phase 2 Implementation Plan.**

We will identify critical student service areas that require detailed analysis. Critical areas will include service areas that affect large numbers of students, areas for which there are significant opportunities for improvement, and areas that are highly visible to the university community. We will develop an implementation plan that will facilitate an instant start up at the

beginning of Phase 2, including detailed work statements and the identification of resource and personnel requirements.

## 4.0 PROJECT SCHEDULE AND DELIVERABLES

### 4.1 Deliverables

1. Bi-monthly progress reviews for the Provost and appropriate departments.
2. Organization chart and flow chart of student services showing interrelationships among student services processes. Student groupings will be superimposed to indicate which groupings are affected by each of the functions/processes.
3. Documentation of current process and information flows for existing student services. List of current staffing levels (peak and normal if different), technology availability, training support, and other factors that affect the delivery of the services.
4. Report on pilot studies to evaluate the current state of student services and students perceptions of those services. Complete documentation of the test instruments and how to administer them.
5. Prioritized list of desired student services that UCF does not currently provide.
6. Documentation of immediate and obvious improvements that were implemented during Phase 1.
7. Detailed Phase 2 implementation plan.

### 4.2 Project Schedule

	1st Quarter Aug 1 - Sept 30	2nd Quarter Oct 1 - Dec 31	3rd Quarter Jan. 1 - Mar 31	4th Quarter Apr 1 - June 30
Task 3.1	*1*	*1*	*1* *1*	*1*
Task 3.2				
Task 3.3			*2*	
Task 3.4				*3*
Task 3.5			*5*	*4*
Task 3.6	*6*	*6*	*6*	*6*
Task 3.7				*7*

\*#\* indicates anticipated completion of Deliverable #

We recommend that a UCF-21 Office be established in a visible location on campus, perhaps in the new Student Union, to heighten awareness of this important effort.