

Overhead Reductions - Utilization of a Four-Day Class Schedule

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Abstract

Central Piedmont Community College implemented a four-day, 40-hour week schedule for the 2009 summer semester, a 12-week period. This initiative was a major change in the College's approach to instruction and general College operations during the time frame of mid-May to August 2nd. The impetus for this experiment was that the College was experiencing significant funding cuts that would inevitably impact the way general operations of the institution could be conducted. The College's administration was concerned about any possible negative impact that would be experienced by students by changing course offerings to a Monday through Thursday schedule rather than the College's normal schedule of operation of seven days per week. The College strategically approached the shortened instructional week by systematically reviewing course schedule requirements early in the planning process. The College's instructional unit began course-by-course reviews to determine how best to meet student needs while reducing the number of days and hours that the College's facilities would be open and in use. At the same time that the instructional impact was being evaluated, the physical impacts of closed facilities and potential cost savings were estimated by the facilities operations department. Additionally, cross-functional teams evaluated the expected consequences of a reduced schedule of operations. The actual outcomes resulted in no reduction in the number of course offerings, a significant increase in full-time equivalency (FTE) earned for the term, and more efficient use of facilities with documented savings in physical operations.

Introduction to the Organization

Central Piedmont Community College (CPCC) is the largest of the 58 community colleges within the North Carolina Community College system. CPCC serves over 75,000 individuals during an academic year, and has served 1.4 million students since the College was founded in 1963. The College's vision is to become the national leader in workforce development. To this end, CPCC was named one of the two best colleges in workforce development by the Ford Foundation and was selected for the Distinguished Performance Award for Community College of the Year by the National Alliance of Business. CPCC's mission as a comprehensive college is the advancement of the life-long educational development of students. The College "accomplishes this purpose by providing high-quality flexible pre-baccalaureate and career-focused educational programs and services which are academically, geographically, and financially accessible." CPCC offers 285 degree, diploma, and certificate programs, along with a comprehensive literacy program and an extensive array of corporate and continuing education offerings.

Statement of the Problem/Initiative

Central Piedmont Community College receives approximately 73 percent of its annual operational funding from the state and local governments. Due to the economic conditions that have reduced revenue receipts for both state and local governments, funding to higher education has been negatively impacted. In the prior two fiscal years, funding reductions have increased from 6 percent to over 13.1 percent in the current fiscal year. The general building maintenance and facility operations budget accounts for approximately 20.2 percent of the College's overall operational budget. Significant resources are necessary to maintain a college that operates six campuses throughout its county-wide service area. CPCC has already undertaken several cost containment initiatives and continues to review ways to reduce overhead costs while maintaining the integrity of the learning process. The College's goal has always been to emphasize cost savings which would have the least adverse impact on students. Thus, the concept of the four-day instructional and work week evolved as a pilot project for the 2009 12-week summer term.

Design

Introduction of the concept and initial design of the project began with the President and the College Cabinet in January 2009 as a response to a 2.1% cut in the County budget for FY 2009 followed by a 10% reduction in the FY 2010 budget allocation for CPCC. The result of these cuts was a \$2.5 million reduction in facilities operating funds over the two fiscal years.

In order to adjust operating hours to four ten-hour days at CPCC, the first task was to review scheduled summer course offerings at all six campuses. The involvement and commitment of the Learning Unit through participation of the Vice President of Learning, Campus Deans, and Division Directors was critical to the success of the program and to the successful realignment of courses to the four-day work week. The modification of the summer course schedule was the first step in implementing the cost savings practice.

After extensive review of course requirements and service needs, it was concluded that four facilities would be exceptions to the four-day operation. The Harper Campus, which is home to most technical and vocational courses, would continue a full seven-day per week course schedule, due to the need for class access to the specialized equipment. One building on Central Campus, which houses the theater and some classrooms, would also remain open on a seven-day schedule to accommodate booked theater performances. The third exemption to the four-day operating schedule was made to accommodate previously scheduled manufacturers' training on Fridays and Saturdays at the Hendrick Automotive Training Center on the Levine Campus. These three locations were made available on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday for scheduled courses and events only. Administrative and student support offices in these facilities adhered to the four-day, 40-hour standard. The fourth exception was the Facilities Services building which

houses the College's security surveillance and dispatch offices and therefore needed to provide uninterrupted service.

After allowing for these exceptions, it was determined that approximately 2.65 million square feet of the College's 2.9 million square feet would be closed from 11 p.m. each Thursday until 6 a.m. on Monday from May 17, 2009, through August 2, 2009. The next step in the process was to renegotiate and adjust contracts for security and housekeeping services to reflect the reduced level of operations and, hence, lower costs. These negotiations were lead by the Associate Vice President for Facilities, the Executive Director of Facilities, and the Director of Security. The cooperation and support of the companies providing housekeeping and security services was a key element in the success of the project based on flexibility in the contract agreement(s) and language that allowed for service level adjustments.

The subsequent task was estimating the potential cost savings generated by the closing of these facilities. The following table was developed in late February 2009 and is the first estimate of potential savings:

12-Week Shutdown except
OC, FS, PX, PD, HP, JH, HCC

	15% Savings	10% Savings	5% Savings
Electric	\$67,749	\$45,166	\$22,583
Natural Gas	\$12,615	\$8,410	\$4,205
Water	\$8,693	\$5,795	\$2,898
Total Utilities	\$89,057	\$59,371	\$29,686
Housekeeping	\$60,000	\$40,000	\$20,000
Security	Maximum \$19,128	Maximum \$19,128	Minimum \$9,712
Total	\$168,185	\$118,499	\$59,398
Most Likely Scenario		\$118,499	

Implementation

In early March 2009, the proposal was discussed with the Board of Trustees and the decision was made to implement these initiatives. Standard hours of operation of 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Monday through Thursday for College support services were adopted; however, classes continued to be scheduled on a 6:30 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. day as is the norm. Employees were notified and began arranging their new schedules for the May 17 start date. Supervisors were asked to be flexible with employees who may have needed assistance balancing personal responsibilities with the new work schedules based on the four 10-hour day work week. CPCC faculty are on a ten-month contract running from August 1 to May 31, and summer courses are taught on a per-course contract; therefore, faculty had no scheduled office hours during the summer term. This allowed for minimal faculty adjustments in response to the four-day operation.

Marketing and effectively communicating the change to students and the public was a priority. Media releases to both television and newspaper were critical in the communication and public relations aspects of the change. The new four-day schedule was highlighted to students beginning in April 2009, the start of summer and pre-fall registration. Signs were posted on all building entrances stating, "This building is closed on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays from May 15 to August 2, 2009." During the first two weekends of the four-day schedule, there were only a few instances of students coming to campuses in an attempt to register and some employees requesting to enter closed buildings. Security advised these persons that there was no admission to closed facilities and when services would be available. Overall the closings were not disruptive or viewed as an inconvenience.

Benefits

Actual savings were approximately \$110,000. Perhaps the greatest benefit was the increasing the public's understanding that funding reductions to community colleges do have noticeable and significant consequences. The adjusted schedule was a tangible, visible result of budget cuts and a reminder that we cannot continue business as usual during these severe economic times.

The extended office hours during the four days made services available and even more convenient for the evening students. An unmeasured benefit and cost savings was the fuel saved by our approximately 1,000 employees as a result of the 20% reduction in commuting. Summer enrollments were not adversely affected; in fact, CPCC realized a 21% FTE enrollment growth for Summer 2009 as compared to Summer 2008. There was an overwhelmingly positive response to the schedule from both students and staff.

Retrospective

Despite the uncertainty of final budget numbers, CPCC did make an early decision to implement the four-day schedule. This early planning was critical to the success of the initiative and the College's ability to negotiate reduced services and costs with our vendors. In retrospect, had the decision been made earlier, the College would have more flexibility with scheduling summer courses and events. The question now facing CPCC is if this will become the standard of operation for future summers or, if funding permits, does the College return to the full seven-day operating schedule at all campuses?