

TQM at State University



As a result of several years of severe cuts to its operating budget by the state legislature, the administration at State University has raised tuition annually for the past five years. Five years ago, getting an education at State University was a bargain for both in-state and out-of-state students; now it is one of the most expensive state universities. An immediate repercussion has been decline in applications for admission. Since a portion of state funding is tied to enrollments, State has kept its enrollments up at a constant level by going deeper into its pool of applications, taking some less-qualified students.

The increase in the cost of a State degree has also caused legislators, parents, and students to be more conscious of the value of a State education – that is, the value parents and students are receiving for their money. This increased scrutiny has been fueled by numerous media reports about the decreased emphasis on teaching in universities, low teaching loads by faculty, and the large number of courses taught by graduate students. This, in turn, has led the state legislature committee on higher education to call for an “outcome assessment program” to determine how well State University is achieving its mission of producing high quality graduates.

On top of those problems, a substantial increase in the college-age population is expected this decade, resulting from a baby boom during the 1990s. Key members of the state legislature have told the university administration that they will be expected to absorb their share of the additional students during the next decade. However, because of the budget situation, they should not expect any funding increases for additional facilities, classrooms, dormitory rooms, or faculty. In effect, they will be expected to do more with their existing resources. State already faces a classroom deficit, and faculty have teaching loads above the average of its peer institutions. Legislators are fond of citing a study that shows that if the university simply gets all the students to graduate within a four-year period or reduces the number of hours required for graduation, they can accommodate the extra students.

The entire scenario has made the university president, Fred McMahan, consider retirement. He has summarized the problems to his administration staff as “having to do more, better, with less.” One of the first things he did to address these problems was to set up a number of task forces made up of faculty and administration staff to brainstorm a variety of topics. Among the topics and problems these task forces addressed were quality in education, educational success, graduation rates, success rates in courses (i.e., the percentage of students passing), teaching, the time to graduation, faculty issues, student issues, facilities, class scheduling, admissions, and classroom space.

Several of the task forces included faculty from engineering and business. These individuals noted that many of the problems the university faced would benefit from the principles and practices of a quality management approach. This recommendation appealed to Fred McMahan and the academic vice president, Anne Baker.

Discuss in general terms how a quality philosophy and practices might be instituted at State University.