



# **Does Customer Service Belong in Higher Education?**

An applied MBA 710 research paper about customer service as it relates to higher education and specifically the service excellence initiative at Coastal Carolina University, Feel the Teal.

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August 8, 2013**

# Does Customer Service Belong in Higher Education?

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## SECTION I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Colleges are starting to see higher education in business- like realities. They are realizing that revenue depends on selling the college (recruitment) to its customers (students and parents). Sales (enrollment) are made based on the college’s brand (image), product (courses, programs, degrees), and by creating a connection with the customer (customer service).”

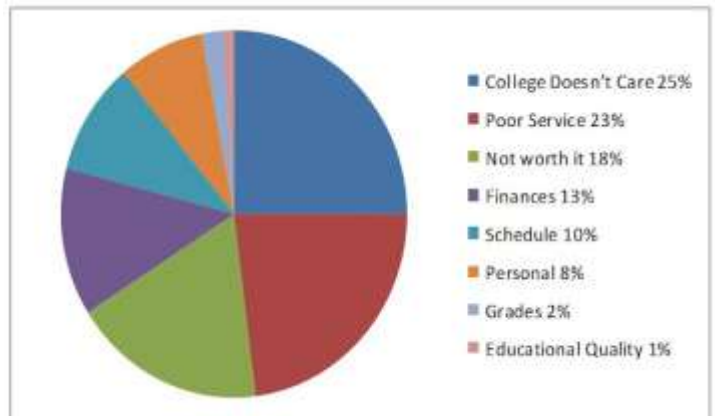
*Embrace the Oxymoron: Customer Service in Higher Education*, Neal Raisman, PhD (7).

Does customer service belong in higher education?

Universities are slowly starting to explore the concept and value of placing a priority on providing good academic customer service. With the current struggling economy and widespread collegiate competition, universities are seeing decreased revenues, lowered budgets, dropping retention numbers and universal cutbacks.

A strategic approach appears necessary to sustain and remain competitive as a university and as a business. As much as some people in colleges and universities cringe at the term “customer service”, colleges and universities are businesses at their very core and must address the reality of customer service in higher education settings. This paper will explore the term “customer service” as well as its current outlooks in higher education and how that applies to higher education.

Neal Raisman’s research shows that almost 50% of students nationwide leave a university due to the perception of the college not caring and/or poor service (12). This research is shared in the side chart and such information about retention is the foundation for Coastal Carolina University’s service initiative and most likely many others. Due to retention being such a hot topic for sustainability in higher education, it is likely that more university will start to explore and ask the question “does customer service belong in higher education?”



Coastal Carolina University (CCU) has recently launched a service excellence initiative called Feel the Teal. CCU’s university wide customer service plan is designed to improve service delivery, customer satisfaction and retention. Successful training programs bring a sense of integrity and loyalty to the institution by all of its customers as well as the extended CCU community. This paper will use that initiative to explore key elements for success of a university service plan.

## SECTION II. CUSTOMER SERVICE OVERVIEW

### Definition of Customer Service

Customer service is a commonly used term in the business world, especially in the hospitality and travel/tourism industry. Service is an expectation and business requirement to compete and retain customers. Service is a subjective word and its meanings can differ based on its definition or precedence. Various businesses define customer service for both their internal and external customers through programs, credos and mantras that place a level of priority on serving the customer.

The Ritz-Carlton Hotel has Gold Standards that serve as the foundation of the business and encompasses the values and philosophy by which they operate. The Ritz - Carlton credo assures to be “a place where the genuine care and comfort of our guests is our highest mission. We pledge to provide the finest personal service and facilities for our guests who will always enjoy a warm, relaxed, yet refined ambience. The Ritz-Carlton experience enlivens the senses, instills well-being, and fulfills even the unexpressed wishes and needs of our guests”. This foundation and definition sets the standards that a Ritz-Carlton guest expects.

Customers vary as much as the expectations of service. Each customer brings different history, experiences, and personal feelings to the service experience. Customers’ individual preferences determine whether their needs were met in a satisfactory manner. When the customer meets service, an individual “moment of truth” is determined and the customer decides whether they received decent service. Customer service is not a department but a feeling provided by the employee or representative on behalf of the organization.

Turban, Lee, King, and Chung (2002) define the term customer service as “a series of activities designed to enhance the level of customer satisfaction—that is, the feeling that a product or service has met the customer’s expectation” (87).

Customer service is a current reality in higher education but it is not defined using the term “customer service”. Customer service is simply treating students with respect and courtesy and like their college experience matters, not giving them better grades than they deserve. It is representing the university as a brand and delivering service that best represents the university as not only an institution of learning but also a brand. Vaill (2008) pointed out, “Education is clearly a service, not a product ... in higher education; they have to be mindful of, responsive to the characteristics, needs, and expectations of the student” (p. 1).

“Student will define customer service in terms of how they perceive the communal equity in a school as well as their sense of three types of return on investment: financial, emotional and associative.” (Raisman, 13).

## **“The Customer is Always Right”**

Customer service can no longer be defined by the outdated, antiquated, and never to be spoken again expression “the customer is always right”. This expression can be traced back to American retailers Marshall Field, John Wanamaker and Gordon Selfridge. This phrase was most likely not intended to be taken literally but to empower employees to create an experience where the customer did not feel wrong. César Ritz (1850-1918), the celebrated French hotelier is credited with saying 'Le client n'a jamais tort' - 'The customer is never wrong'. That's not the phrase that people now remember, but is still translated to be said as 'the customer is always right'.

The customer is not always right but it is the responsibility of anyone working as a service provider to make the situation right. Because of the long standing history and misperception of the expression “the customer is always right” it is important to refute this definition, especially in the context of higher education. When the customer is a student or parent, they are more than likely to be going through this experience of college for the first time. They most likely do not know what they want or most importantly, they do not know what they need.

Customer service in higher education is about so much more than smiling and giving customers what they want. “It is a more complex interaction of expectation, investment, process, actions and certainly, outcome or final result.” (Raisman, 25).

Educating the customer as much as possible is key to providing pro-active service in higher education. Educating the customer means providing as many ways to communicate the resources available in a fast, friendly and easy manner. Many students are sent on the “university shuffle” and told to go to one building to get a signature, only to be told to go to four other buildings only to return to the original location.

Service excellence means addressing the issue and finding ways to make a process more student centered. Student success is the goal of any higher education institution and to achieve this goal, life and activities must be focused on what is best for the students and learning. It is not about who is right and who is wrong, but making the situation right.

## **Current Outlooks**

There appears to be a disjuncture in higher education between customer service and academic integrity. These two goals are often thought in higher education to be natural enemies; we can't have both it is assumed, at least not at the same time.

Despite some internal push back about the concept of customer service in higher education, more universities are currently re-evaluating the way they view their students and employees. By taking a more customer focused approach and implementing a service excellence initiative, universities are linking service to functional synergy and retention. Addressing customer service

is more important today because of the need of many colleges to compete for and retain students.

Academic integrity is not dependent on maintaining an indifference to student needs. It doesn't serve anyone's interests. Customer service is treating students with respect and courtesy and like their college experience matters, it is not giving them better grades than they deserve.

Georgia Governor Sonny Perdue launched a Customer Service Initiative in 2006 as a unique effort to engage all state employees in improving service to citizens through a three-pronged strategy to become faster (speeding up services); friendlier (developing a customer-focused culture); and easier (adopting an enterprise approach to managing call centers). This program encompasses a statewide communications strategy; uniform customer and employee job satisfaction surveying; customer service focused pre-employment screening, orientation, training and performance measurement; and creation of a central point of access for state services by telephone and the internet. Initial research has shown that Georgia's higher education institutions have benefited greatly by adopting these comprehensive programs and will serve as a great resource and precedent for this plan.

Universities that have some form of service programs are listed below.

| <b>Other University Programs</b>    | <b>Students</b> | <b>Program Components</b>  |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|--|
| Brigham Young University            | 30,684          | I AM BYU: Acronym that reminds employees to create positive environment for customers  |
| High Point University               | 3,689           | Concierge service where all HPU services are located on one page   |
| Kennesaw State University           | 24,600          | Customer Service Recognition, Customer Service Training and KSU Unit Customer Service Review   |
| Lamar University                    | 14,000          | Emphasis on professionalism at all times ("Zero-tolerance")  |
| Lansing Community College           | 20,000          | Everybody is empowered and quality service is provided. Helps faculty and staff work together. Dean reported walking around school greeting everyone |
| Macon State College                 | 5,702           | Emphasis on phone service and greeting customers properly  |
| Middle Georgia State College        | 8,000           | Training program for staff to enhance experiences of customers & how to handle a customer  |
| Northern Arizona University         | 26,002          | On-Site and 24/7 Online training programs  |
| SC State University                 | 4,000           | Customer service tips & strategies to improve customer service & to enhance university image   |
| Syracuse University                 | 21,029          | CAPS: Communication, Appearance, Problem-Solving   |
| University of Colorado (3 campuses) | 57,591          | Understanding that everyone can be a leader and sharing ideas that can make a difference   |
| University of Massachusetts Boston  | 15,847          | A "one stop shop" for all customer service needs   |
| University of Texas at Austin       | 50,000          | Specific trainings focused on "plateauing" and how to continuously improve customer service  |
| University of Texas at El Paso      | 22,740          | Golden Rule-Treating others, as we would want to be treated  |
| University of West Virginia         | 29,707          | An initiative to recognize excellent service   |

#### **MBA 710- Coastal Carolina University (Soisson)**

Faculty appear to have the most hesitation to customer service being a priority in an academic setting. The word “customer” is met with some reservation because of the connotation of calling a student a “customer”. The word does not appear to fit, as they are such a unique type of customer. For example, students pay for a full semester of classed but will then skip class, turning down the service they paid for - unlike a traditional customer who would not normally do this.

There is a perceived difference between traditional customers and student “customers” in that students can’t expect to just pay and receive a finished product. They must work for what they want even if it doesn’t happen the way they want it (example- 8 a.m. classes). Students aren’t customers in the same way that hotel guests and cruise ship passengers are seen as customers.

Another reservation to the service focus is where the student feels entitled to good grades whether they earn them or not. Just last month, a Lehigh student sued the university for 1.3 million dollars. She did this because she received a C in the class that she needed to pass to graduate. She was denied her license.

“A judge in eastern Pennsylvania ruled Thursday against a former Lehigh University graduate student who sued to have a grade of C-plus changed to a B and was seeking \$1.3 million in damages. Northampton County Judge Emil Giordano made the ruling in the lawsuit filed by Megan Thode, a report by The Express-Times of Easton (<http://bit.ly/VXlYj2>) said. Thode was seeking damages over the C-plus grade in a 2009 graduate-level therapist internship course she alleged was retaliation because she supports gay marriage. She said the grade is preventing her from becoming a licensed therapist. An expert estimated Thode would suffer \$1.3 million in damages in earnings she would never make as a result over the course of her career” (PA Judges rejects...).

## Who is our “Customer”?

Higher education serves such a large variety of customers. There are external and internal customers within any organization or business and higher education is no different. External customers are those who partake or participate in the organization’s product or service while internal customers are those who help to produce the product or service.

It is important to know the type of customer so as to establish appropriate levels of communication. The information we share with fellow internal customers may not be appropriate for the external customer and this is important in any operation.

Customers are very different. No two customers are to be treated the same since all customers are different and have varied experiences and expectations. The Golden Rule states that we should treat people the way we want to be treated and this has worked for many years in providing service. However because we are all so different, there is a new way of service excellence thinking called The

Platinum Rule. The Platinum Rule encourages us to treat others the way they want to be treated and this is meeting the customer where they are. It is much more customer or other focused.

External Customers in Higher Education

|         |                                 |                    |                         |
|---------|---------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|
| Parents | Grandparents/Families           | Potential students | Business and industries |
| Donors  | Potential donors                | Board of trustees  | Community               |
| Media   | Other Universities and colleges | Employers          | Alumni                  |

Internal Customers in Higher Education

|         |                   |                |                  |
|---------|-------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Faculty | Staff             | Administration | Student workers  |
| Alumni  | Board of Trustees | Alumni         | Campus Community |

All customers rely on businesses to stay true to their word and do what they say they are going to do. For example, when a pizza company claims their delivery will be “30 minutes or less and it’s free”, the customer expects that the company will not protest or make excuses if they are late. Likewise, universities should keep their promises, and Ricky L. Boyd agrees stating “being true to your word means a lot to students and their families” (36)

**Coastal Carolina University**

Coastal Carolina University (CCU) has launched a service excellence initiative called Feel the Teal. The initiative is focused on creating a university wide culture of exceptional customer service. In doing so, this will positively contribute to customers being served faster, friendlier and easier. Students will then be more sufficiently satisfied with the quality of their college experiences at CCU and they will more likely stay through graduation. This objective is vital to retention at CCU.

Coastal Carolina University is a dynamic, public comprehensive liberal arts institution located in Conway, S.C. The University offers 55 areas of study toward the baccalaureate degree and seven master's degree programs in education, writing, coastal marine and wetland studies, and the MBA. Ten new undergraduate degree programs were recently added, including biochemistry, economics, graphic design, information systems, musical theatre, theatre arts, as well as criminology, health and aging, and social justice tracks in sociology.

CCU is proud to offer world-class faculty, a nationally competitive NCAA I athletic program, an inspiring cultural calendar, and a tradition of community interaction that is fueled by more than



120 student clubs and organizations. The university has, on average, 720 staff and 415 faculty serving approximately 9200 students per semester.

The President of Coastal Carolina University, Dr. David DeCenzo, launched the Feel the Teal Service Excellence initiative in August of 2012. “We must together build a strong university wide culture of exceptional service where everyone can Feel the Teal. By focusing on undergraduate and graduate academic excellence and good academic customer service, we will see an increase in student willingness to learn and engage not only in their studies, but also in experiential learning and leadership activities. Good customer service will better enable us to offer a quality product – education” (DeCenzo, 2013).

### **CCU’s Feel the Teal Service Excellence Initiative**

Coastal Carolina University is dedicated to providing high quality educational programs and services. The Customer Service Initiative is based on the idea and principle that colleges and universities are businesses at their core. Universities must deliver the education experience to their “customers” or “clients” (students) through products or services (courses and majors) that lead to the finished product (graduation and then a successful career and life after college).

The primary objective of this initiative is to make certain that everyone who interacts with Coastal Carolina University in any way—be that person a student, a member of the general public or CCU employees—gets treated with care, courtesy and respect.

Do they “feel the teal”?

This objective of this initiative will be met through the design, development and implementation of an effective and ongoing customer service program that supports and provides university employees with leadership, training and development, departmental collaboration and support, and communications to perform their jobs effectively.

## **SECTION III. SERVICE PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

### **Key Elements for Success of a University Service Excellence**

The following five elements are key for a university or college to implement a service excellence initiative or plan.

#### **Leadership**

The leadership of the institution will (and must) demonstrate the standard of customer service performance to be emulated by all faculty and staff through personal example. “The first person who has to deliver excellent service to everyone is the president. If he or she is not capable of making people feel as if they matter and are valued at the very least, that sets a tone that pervades the entire institution” (Raisman, 8).

Someone will need to create, implement and carry out the needed structure for the initiative. Coastal Carolina University’s Service Excellence Plan called for a Director of Service Excellence. This person established minimum standards and steps of service for the university. These standards guide behaviors when anyone on campus has the opportunity to interact with a customer. This plan leader will need support through a Steering Committee with a focus on gaining an initial assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in regard to university - wide service. Ideal members of this committee will include a representative from faculty, staff, housing, campus recreation, admissions, and any service strong departments.

This committee will help to ensure the service plan undergoes continuous improvement and compliance. Committee members will communicate frequently by way of e- mail, telephone, committee meetings, and personal visits to ensure timely flow of ideas and fine tuning of the Service Plan. The focus of the meetings will be to review progress and to address concerns and challenges that may hinder the implementation of a process, friendliness of our team and/or making things easier.

Institutional performance appraisals should include customer service as a primary rating area for enhanced departmental and personal accountability. Employees supporting the initiative through attitude and action will be recognized and rewarded. Supervisors of any employees demonstrating deficiencies in this area will develop individual improvement plans to assist the employees in enhancing their performance.

The university’s leadership must cast the vision for a culture moving toward a more defined “customer focus”. The aspiration is to have the right people on the bus headed in the same direction. As Jim Collins states in one of the best business books of our time, *Good to Great*, “It is better to first get the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats, and then figure out where to drive.” Retention applies to keeping those customers (external and internal) that will steer the figurative bus in the right direction.

## Training and Development

Dr. Neal Raisman and Associates' research has found that it is customer service or the lack of it that either propels students to enroll or causes 12% of them to turn away once they have had contact with a school. This statistic alone tells us that how we answer a phone is very important and can create a positive moment of truth or a negative moment of misery for the potential student/customer.

Training is key to provide the needed instruction and expectation level of such service skills. A basic training course should be created and used in training various departments to start the process. This workshop will be the foundation for customer service learning and all employees should go through this training.

To better serve students, Ewers (2010) suggested that institutions have employees attend customer service training sessions to learn the basics of customer service. Yet many in academia find this a hard pill to swallow.

Coastal Carolina University piloted the first training with Campus Recreation on a training module called CCU Service Basics on August 15, 2012 to help prepare the staff with the needed service skills for the opening of the HTC Student Convocation and Recreation Center. The session was very well received and scored very high marks on the evaluations (78 evaluations were turned in with an average rating of 4.86 out of 5). Below are comments from the evaluations.

*"This training not only helped me with my job on campus, but it will help me with my future jobs." Stephanie Bunch*

*"The workshop was awesome! I learned an extremely large amount of information that will be very helpful in college and the real world." Dana Thoel*

*"This was a great workshop; it definitely gave me encouragement on always giving 150% in my job every day. I am very thankful for this opportunity and look forward to putting these lessons into practice." Erica Peterson*

Target frontline staff with the most amounts of "touch points" with the customers for the following trainings (example – campus tour guides, welcome center, orientation leaders, etc.).

Workshops like this will have benefits and will hopefully be reflected in future retention scores. For example, "following a workshop at the University of Maine in Fort Kent, retention was reported to have increased 5% by UMFK Provost Dr. Rachel Albert. This was 2% more than the administration had hoped for and was achieved because the University took the ideas from the workshop and made them part of the culture." (Raisman, 14).

All newly hired employees at a university should be required to complete a formal orientation program. An overview of the university's commitment to customer service should be included

in the orientation program. The Director of Training and Development will lead these sessions of orientation as often as appropriate.

A university-wide training plan is important to serve as part of the initiative's minimum standards. Training topics will include customer service as a base but also include soft skill developmental opportunities in areas such as leadership, attitude, business etiquette, communication skills, and others. Departments will be able to customize departmental training plans and choose specific training seminars and activities to enhance their specific department's training needs.

A "Train the Trainer" program can be offered for each department to take advantage of so that training is a consistent and constant process and not just an annual event. This is to ensure uniform training in all departments and an adherence to the brand within everyday service. Th

## **Departmental Collaboration and Support**

Employees should be included in the improvement process of plan and given meaningful opportunities to provide input and solutions. Allowing support for time in the quarterly meeting to share goals and nurture motivation and collaboration is just a start. Staff should be encouraged to improve customer service in their departments in creative way that best reflects their department's specific customer needs, values and direction.

Forums yield candid conversation to share goals, address concerns and develop relationships. These types of "open trainings" should be encouraged within all departments. They bring staff together to share in specific customer service accomplishments for the year, build morale and instill a sense of unity among our departments. A strong recommendation for this phase is to highlight best practices from various departments and use personal connections through testimonials (building on the relationships). These opportunities build strong internal customer service skills, which will only sustain will departmental support and a commitment from the "top down".

This key element is necessary to create an effective support network that best serves the customers (students, parents, external clients, the local community and each other). Through this "customer focused" plan, a college can build its culture based on collaboration and strengthened through customer retention.

## **Communications**

Effective communication is paramount to the initial perception and eventual success of the customer service plan. Effective communications are the very essence of interpersonal relations, efficiency and productivity. How well we communicate with our customers, both

internal and external, ultimately determines our success or failure as an educational institution of higher learning.

Vision casting from the president about the new customer service initiative and direction should be shared with the campus community. All employees should receive a plan summary as soon as possible. Continued vision sharing is imperative to creating a culture of service and team morale in all employees representing the university.

For the vision to become part of the culture and every day service, employee “buy in” must be fostered through continued communication. This must be a top priority for the President more than anyone in the institution. He must establish his full endorsement and commitment. The quote “communication does not equal understanding” is very applicable. The vision must be repeated and threaded throughout the everyday culture and service experience so everyone can “feel the teal”.

This plan will need to include action items that show a true commitment to a “customer focused” culture. Once customer service is used in everyday decisions and results in positive experiences, employees will move past the perception that this initiative is not the “flavor of the month” and acknowledge it’s here to stay.

Communications includes the current university website and showcasing the philosophies that drive the initiative, tools/tips to help units improve customer service, changes in campus policies and procedures, best practices, customer service highlights, and other relevant resources. A URL based resource page for employees would create easy access to training materials and additional resources for new and veteran staff.

The customer service plan will need to be branded to create an image of the program and to properly market the commitment to service delivery. A name, logo and Facebook page will be created to increase the awareness of this new program.

## **Evaluation and Measurement**

Evaluation of performance improvement include, but are not limited to, web-based surveys, comment cards, training workshop evaluations, on-the-spot comments through campus interviews, personal oral or written testimonies, and eventually retention as a customer service indicator. Survey results will be disseminated to appropriate faculty and staff.

Institutional Research department can create, administer, and compile the results from customer service surveys to gather feedback from students, employees and external customers regarding consistency and usefulness of information received, timeliness of assistance, and level of customer service received. The survey results may create additional action items to achieve exceptional and friendly customer service.

Mapping is a tool to review each step of a process/service through the eyes of the customer and determine areas of opportunity at each step to provide excellent customer service rather than mediocre service.

Quality Assurance (QA) visits will be created in the early phase based on the training content and implemented in a second year to evaluate service delivery. The manner with which a quality assurance program is rolled out is crucial to whether employees buy in or push back. These audits are to catch people doing things right and are never to be punitive. Findings from the shop allow leadership to better measure improvements and assess points of improvement, which then help plan future trainings.

Criteria of the shop will be based on the minimum standards and delivery techniques taught during the trainings. Audits also look at the environment provided for and by the customers in work areas and offices from layout and space through lighting and clutter as they affect the customer's sense of reflected value and quality.

Areas to be audited include reception areas, admissions, counseling, financial aid, registrar, dining halls, and bookstore. At CCU QAs will assess if customers can "feel the teal" – if it's a Tuesday, are faculty and staff wearing teal for "Teal Tuesday"; if a customer asks where a specific room is and a point is appropriate, did the staff member use the "Disney point".

Service levels will be assessed through a focus on the following:

- Wait time- how promptly people are recognized and served
- Acknowledgment of student presence and manner of the recognition given
- How questions are responded to
- Are accurate directions given
- Availability of information at point of contact
- Use of university specific verbiage (i.e.- residence halls instead of dorms, students instead of kids, my pleasure instead of no problem)
- Telephone protocols used by customer contacts to aid to detract from service to campus callers

There should be an environment that encourages and rewards employees who take ownership of customer issues and use their initiative to address customer concerns in a timely and efficient manner. To this end, an employee recognition program – a systematic way to celebrate and reward individual employees and service teams, which provide superior support to the customers-- should be implemented.

**CCU Feel the Teal Phase I – August 2012- July 2013  
“Heightened Awareness”**

The following is a break down assessment of Phase I of Coastal Carolina University’s Feel the Teal Service Excellence. Each key element and its correlating action items accomplished are listed to share what has been identified as priorities in the first year.

| Key Elements   | Phase I Action Items Accomplished  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Leadership</b></p> <p>To introduce and implement the Feel the Teal Service Excellence Initiative to the CCU community</p>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dr. DeCenzo will oversee the immediate implementation (Phase I) and direction of the plan</li> <li>- Eileen Soisson will identify the needed structure for the initiative and transition out of Career Services through Phase I</li> <li>- Soisson will assume the role of Director of Training and Development in January.</li> <li>- Identify Feel the Teal Leadership Team (65 ppl); meets every two months</li> <li>- Identify Steering Committee members as dr. Michael Latta, Dr. mark Mitchell, Steve Harrison, Keshav Jagannathan, Jody Davis, April sager and Eileen Soisson; committee meets every month</li> <li>- Include customer service in institutional performance appraisals for enhanced accountability</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Training &amp; Development</b></p> <p>To design and implement a university wide customer service training program.</p>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create a Service Basics Training</li> <li>- Implement CCU Service Basics (TEAL Module One) training for all staff, students workers and other front line employees; trained over 1300 employees</li> <li>- Created a heightened awareness of the two fingered Disney point, five foot- ten foot rule, platinum rule, verbiage and service skills</li> <li>- Begin to develop service excellence training plan</li> <li>- Present CCU’s commitment to customer service at new employee orientations</li> <li>- Order logo pens and prizes for trainings</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Departmental Collaboration &amp; Support</b></p> <p>To encourage idea and solution sharing about current service issues.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Meet with various departments to assess current service delivery and feedback about initiative</li> <li>- Create open discussion through Director of Service Excellence</li> <li>- Provide departmental (customized) training for those who express interest</li> <li>- Identify possible concierge program that evolved into the CHANT411</li> </ul>   |

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | <p>Program and securing April Sager as coordinator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coordinate August retreat to celebrate one year of initiative, address current service realities and plan forward</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Communications</b></p> <p>To raise awareness of Feel the Teal through effective and constant communication opportunities</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Release official statement from the President about the new service excellence initiative (January 2013)</li> <li>- Monthly submissions about Feel the Teal for the CCU employee newsletter, The Athenaeum</li> <li>- Heighten campus awareness of customer service</li> <li>- Feel the Teal Logo developed by University Communications</li> <li>- Create Feel the Teal Twitter page #feelthetealcccu</li> <li>- Present educational session about CCU's Service Excellence Initiative at ACUHO-I Conference and Expo (June 13-19; Making Good Academic Customer Service A Reality); CCU Student Affairs One Day Conference: May 21; SCASFAA Conference: May 22; SEDUG Conference: November 14</li> <li>- Create customer service video to show what has occurred from January-April</li> <li>- Present Feel the Teal to the Board of Trustees</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Evaluation &amp; Measurement</b></p> <p>To research evaluations measurement tools that can be used to assess the university's and customer service processes and delivery</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Measure feedback about CCU Service Basics training by from Employees (faculty, staff) are now being measured with satisfaction surveys</li> <li>- Design Quality Assurance evaluation reports based on the content taught in CCU Service Basics training</li> <li>- Piloted Quality Assurance Program with Campus Recreation; CR scored 92% average of all the visits</li> <li>- Research recognition program options that recognize service specific behaviors and results</li> </ul>   |



**CCU Feel the Teal Phase II - August 2013 – July 2014**  
**“Decisions and Empowerment”**

The following is a break down of Phase II of Coastal Carolina University’s Feel the Teal Service Excellence. Each key element and its correlating action items to be accomplished are listed to share what has been identified as priorities in the second year.

| Key Elements  | Phase II Action Items  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Leadership</b></p> <p>To lead this initiative from the top down and create a culture of service empowerment and decision making</p>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create a more visible presence of the President on campus</li> <li>- Signed thank you and support notecards from the President</li> <li>- Surprise visits of appreciation by the President</li> <li>- Empower Director of Service Excellence for effective decision making</li> <li>- Establish specific year goals for Steering Committee</li> <li>- Identify Service Champions (staff) and Student Success (faculty) Committees members and establish bi-monthly meetings</li> <li>- Build Feel the Teal team to include staff to offer administrative duties, marketing duties, technical and graphic support</li> <li>- Encourage departmental leaders to let the “vision leak” to their staff</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Training &amp; Development</b></p> <p>To implement a university-wide service excellence training program with various modules and options</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue to offer CCU Service Basics for all new employees</li> <li>- Add more interactive exercises and videos to training sessions</li> <li>- Design marketing “take away” item for each service training session for participants to take back to work as reminder of content</li> <li>- Implement Attitude of Service (TEAL Module Two), CCU History and Traditions (TEAL Module Three) and Dealing with Difficult Situations and Customers (TEAL Module Four) training sessions</li> <li>- Develop CCU Service Excellence certification program</li> <li>- Work on department training plans</li> <li>- Add faculty to training expectations</li> <li>- Bring in Neal Raisman for staff development and faculty roll out (Nov, 2013)</li> <li>- Bring in guest speakers to add to the training plan</li> <li>- Start creating program for Train the Trainer program</li> <li>- Work with IT to use a course management system</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Departmental Collaboration &amp; Support</b></p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Create time in schedules for quarterly meeting to share goals and nurture motivation and collaboration of best practices</li> </ul>   |

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|--|---|
| <p>To explore discussion opportunities contributing to a more empowered, motivated and supported staff.</p>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Support current departmental morale with informal discussion programs</li> <li>- Allow for staff to identify what “is broken” and how to fix it (address the thought of “We’ve Always Done it That Way”)</li> <li>- Create customized for each department Five Steps of Service</li> <li>- Provide retreat and meeting facilitation for open discussion and upwards communication</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Communications</b></p> <p>To implement effective communications regarding CCU’s customer service initiative, progress, changes and updates</p>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Continue Athenaeum articles focused on service excellence from the President</li> <li>- Develop CCU Feel the Teal webpage to include monthly President’s message, service tips, archives from trainings</li> <li>- Create URL based resource page for easy access to training materials</li> <li>- Create Feel the Teal Facebook, Instagram and increase presence on Twitter</li> <li>- Design Feel the Teal brochure</li> <li>- Maintain customer service feedback links from all departments.</li> <li>- Identify potential members for advisory council made up of other like universities that currently have a service program</li> <li>- Utilize Feel the Teal print materials such as notecards to recognize service excellence examples campus wide</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Evaluation &amp; Measurement</b></p> <p>To measure university and customer service processes, friendliness and accessibility as they apply to customer service satisfaction levels</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Acknowledge retention numbers as they may correlate with service excellence</li> <li>- Research other universities and colleges’ service initiatives</li> <li>- Conduct internal focus groups made up of students, faculty and staff in October 2013 and February 2014</li> <li>- Implement Quality Assurance evaluation reports based on the content taught in CCU Service Basics training</li> <li>- Document benchmarks of program</li> </ul>   |

## SECTION IV. CLOSING SUMMARY

Universities and colleges are much more competitive due to the new options available for learning. It is not a matter of whether they will serve their customers but how they will serve their customers as a competitive advantage. Kotler and Fox (1995) state, “the best organization in the world will be ineffective if the focus on ‘customers’ is lost. This applies to higher education and the sooner universities and colleges start to have this conversation the better. It is the finding of this paper that customer service does indeed belong in higher education.

Coastal Carolina University’s recently launched service excellence initiative Feel the Teal has seen changed behaviors in a short time in regard to behavior changes and a heightened awareness of the value of service. The initiative has only been in place for a year but with the five key elements of leadership, training and development, departmental collaboration and support, communications, and evaluation and measurement in place, there is a great foundation laid out for future success. It is with great encouragement that other universities put a call out for service excellence and measure the benefits of such a program.

Boyd (2012) shares specific tips that academic advisers and other institutional officials can follow to provide quality service:

- Treat students with dignity and respect. This is a basic human necessity and right.
- Give students clear directions on how to solve their problems and issues. Students should not be given the runaround. Students are at college to study and learn, not go on a wild goose chase all over campus trying to find the answers to simple questions.
- Be responsive to students and their parents. “If you tell a parent you will call them back today, then call them back today” (Ewers, 2010, p. 2). Being true to your word means a lot to students and their families.
- Give timely answers to students’ questions and regular feedback on their progress.

Regarding the benefits of good customer-student relationships, Emery et al. (2001) said, “Student-customer satisfaction directly correlates to larger enrollments: Happy student stay in school, so retention rates remain high; happy students tell their high-school friends, so recruitment numbers are higher ...” (p. 2). More students generate more tuition revenue and in the current economic reality this tells us that service excellence must be threaded throughout higher education operations and practices.

For colleges and universities who place a vision and value on service excellence rewards can translate into increased revenue through improved recruitment and retention, reduced recruitment costs, improved service and satisfaction, quicker yield conversions and closer internal working relationships. This term of customer service is still new and somewhat foreign in higher education but it sure to be a competitive advantage in the future.

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