Recruiting and Training Staff

A Best Practice / Case Study

▶ **Process Improved:** General office functioning (and morale!) through the development of “Guiding Principles” and “Mission Statement”

▶ **Unit(s):** College of Letters and Science Honors Program

▶ **Customers of the Process and Their Needs:** L&S Honors Program office staff and students

▶ **Problem/Opportunity Statement:** The L&S Honors Program has gone through several transitions in recent years, including an organizational restructuring as well as various personnel changes. In addition, the Program continues to grow in terms of student and faculty involvement, as well as sponsorship of new educational and co-curricular opportunities. In light of all of the changes taking place, the staff recognized the need for a kind of “re-grouping” that would identify who we are, where we want to go, and how to get there.

▶ **Process:** In January 2006, we held a five-hour staff retreat, facilitated by the Office of Quality Improvement, at which we identified the strengths of our office, our areas for improvement, and began to develop our guiding principles. Following the retreat, staff members collaborated to synthesize the information and drive it through several different iterations, including list-like documents and visual representations. We held a follow-up retreat in August 2006, again facilitated by the Office of Quality Improvement. At this second retreat, we further defined what “success” means for our office, established goals for the year, and drew up a list of action items. Among those items was the creation of an office mission statement. Following this second retreat, staff members again collaborated to draft this statement, which was “finalized” by staff and the Faculty Honors Committee in January and February 2007.

▶ **Results:** This entire process has improved staff collaboration, collectivity and morale; and reaffirmed that horizontal working relations are possible within the hierarchical structure of the university. The more publicly visible results are the L&S Honors Program Guiding Principles and Mission Statement, as well as the integration of these materials into our interviewing and training for new staff, and evaluations of continuing staff.

▶ **Lessons Learned:** *The value of naming the problem:* By collectively identifying and discussing the issues and circumstances that negatively affected office functioning, we were also able to reach consensus on what we needed to do to move forward and improve. *The importance of outside facilitation:* Having an outside facilitator was crucial to our success because it allowed everyone to fully participate. *The necessity of having an individual or core group to keep the process moving along:* Without three or four individuals committed to seeing this process through, it would have fizzled long ago.
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 ► **Next Steps:** Keep the Guiding Principles and Mission Statement “alive” by further integrating them into the office culture and by reviewing them annually at a staff meeting/retreat in the late summer or early fall. Students comprise the majority of our staff and, as a result, turnover is constant; each new staff member brings new qualities and perspectives to the Program; our changing nature needs to be reflected in these documents. For the documents – and, more specifically, the commitments outlined in them – to be truly alive, we need to ensure that they are present in all aspects of our operations. This entails tailoring our public personas (website, publications, etc.) to be in line with the principles and mission. *Develop a Strategic Plan for the L&S Honors Program.* This is particularly important in light of the Program’s growth and the fact that we will be moving to a new and larger space in the near future. In this process, we will draw from our retreat experiences over the past year and utilize the Guiding Principles and Mission Statement as a foundation from which to build.

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