

Applying Lean Six Sigma to College Processes

Gateway Technical College's revolutionary path to quality improvement

Overview

THE CLIENT

Located in southeastern Wisconsin, Gateway Technical College serves approximately 25,000 students annually in the counties of Kenosha, Racine and Walworth.



THE CHALLENGE

Apply Lean Six Sigma principles to an educational institution to improve process efficiencies and enhance quality of service.

THE SOLUTION

- Created the Office of Quality Systems under the Division of Institutional Effectiveness and Student Success
- Partnered with The Quality Group to develop a Lean e-Learning series for the education sector and piloted final training

THE RESULTS

Gateway is developing a pervasive new culture based on Lean Six Sigma methodology and continual process improvement. Highlights include:

- 100% of Gateway employees have completed basic LSS White Belt training, which was developed internally
- LSS expertise continues to grow internally via the Lean Six Sigma curriculum
- Successful Lean initiatives across multiple departments have resulted in better service to customers, better environment for employees and better ROI for the institution
- Incorporated "creating a culture of excellence and continual improvement" as the second pillar of the College's Vision 3.2.1 Strategic Plan, under which the Lean Six Sigma component cascaded
- Prioritized college funding to invest \$175,000 to Lean Six Sigma training/projects

Step 1: The Office of Quality Systems

Since 2006, Gateway Technical College has been delivering Lean Six Sigma (LSS) training to its external business partners, using e-Learning modules developed by The Quality Group (TQG).

In 2013, Gateway decided to apply those same Lean principles (which had delivered such impressive transformations to its business partners) to its own processes. Ultimately, the college wanted to improve efficiencies and reduce waste to deliver a superior experience for all stakeholders – from students, business partners, and taxpayers to faculty and staff.

Under the visionary leadership of Gateway President and CEO Dr. Bryan D. Albrecht, the college introduced its quality journey with a bang: In September 2013, it established the Office of Quality Systems.

"Organizations often hire outside consulting services to implement LSS process improvements," said Kamaljit K. Jackson, Quality Systems Manager at Gateway. "But we wanted to build Lean capacity within our own institution."

"Investing in Lean Six Sigma quality training for all employees is a fundamental building block for long-term system growth."

—Dr. Bryan D. Albrecht,
President and CEO,
Gateway Technical College



Step Two: Lean for Education e-Learning

Within seven months of establishing the Office of Quality Systems, Gateway provided every one of its 604 employees—from HR and faculty to custodians and frontline staff—with basic (White Belt) LSS training.

According to Albrecht, that first level of training was important: “Creating a culture of service at Gateway Technical College begins with building a common awareness and understanding of the tools necessary to infuse quality systems into our organization.” Gateway also offered its employees the same higher-level LSS training (Green Belt and Black Belt) that it provides to its business partners. The initial problem was that the existing curriculum was heavily slanted toward the manufacturing industry. “We don’t make widgets here,” says Jackson. “Our employees were getting stuck on the manufacturing examples, which didn’t feel relevant to our college processes.”

Gateway took another bold step: It partnered with TQG to develop Lean for Education, a 12-module e-Learning series specific to the education sector. The one-of-a-kind curriculum provides relevant and highly effective Lean training for college employees, in a blended learning format.

“The blended approach combines web-based modules with instructor-led training,” says Jackson. “It gives our employees the flexibility to learn the basics of Lean online, from wherever they are, at any time of day or night. This allows the instructor to focus classroom time on real-life examples, hands-on learning and lively discussions.”

“Gateway’s quality journey is about bringing internal subject-matter experts to the table to leverage their expertise and talents, empowering them to review processes and ultimately refining them based on relevant needs for our current environment - through LSS we accomplish that and much, much more!”



—Kamaljit K. Jackson,
Quality Systems Manager
Gateway Technical College

Outcomes and Insights

Gateway employees have successfully applied their Lean learning to implement successful improvement initiatives across various departments. Here are some impressive results:

- **Mail Delivery:** Reduced mail delivery costs by \$80,000 and cut delivery time by more than half
- **VA Benefits:** Streamlined certification process, reducing the number of online steps required for certifying a student from 11 to 4 and implementing automated reporting, ultimately reducing processing time per semester for staff and improving service for Veterans
- **Youth Options Program:** Reviewed process to streamline process across the district. This process review brought 2 divisions together to collaborate and create a standardized process, review internal gaps, build transparency and visibility across the institution, delineate roles and responsibilities for all parties involved, and develop an SOP (Standard Operating Procedures) manual to be used for training and communication

Through their quality initiatives, Gateway staff have identified **over 100 projects** that require a process review. Other projects currently underway include: Onboarding and Offboarding of Employees, IT Procurement for Staff, English Language Learners (ELL), Room Scheduling, Recycling Efforts, and Institutional Memberships.

RESULTS AND ADVICE

For other colleges interested in learning about what Gateway has done, Jackson shares the following must haves:

- 1. Executive Buy-In:** No initiative will be successful without executive buy-in. Our leadership team felt this was important enough to do – that it was the right thing to do for our students, our faculty and our staff – that they revised the strategic plan to include “creating a culture of excellence and continual improvement” as the second pillar.
- 2. Superior Training:** The Lean for Education series provided the effective, relevant and flexible training we needed to build internal Lean capacity at Gateway.
- 3. Include Everyone:** This is a long journey, and a collaborative process. You must include everyone to do better together.

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