

Optimizing for Tomorrow: Enhancing University Operations and Staffing

Higher Education



Background

The client is a small, private university with approximately 4,000 enrolled undergraduate students and 450 employees. The university offers a career-focused, hands-on education in technical design and engineering. The university was in transition with leadership, with a new president starting at the close of the academic year. The university was operating on a strategic plan extension under the outgoing president to allow for the new president to develop his vision for the university.

Challenge

Many university departments expressed the need for more administrative staff to serve their departments and the students. The CFO and CHRO wanted to assess actual staffing needs and help inform the new president prior to joining the university later that year. Curtis Strategy was contracted to assess competing revenue concerns and interdepartmental resource needs by conducting a benchmarking study. The study compared administrator staffing against key metrics for eleven peer institutions using IPEDS data. While this provided quantitative data, Curtis Strategy suggested conducting an Organization Assessment to further evaluate the university's functional area needs.

SOLUTION

Through interviews with over 100 staff and faculty and a comprehensive review of org charts, department specific documents, and current roles and responsibilities, Curtis Strategy was able to assess the university's structure and function, staffing and capacity, and process. We found that several of the issues raised were the direct result of a lack of strategic focus and will be addressed with the development of a strategic plan under the new president.

The Organization Assessment and Benchmarking Analysis both revealed that an investment in staffing will be necessary to address the needs of the university. Trends in higher education point to a need for the addition of administrative staff to support the changing demands and expectations of students and families, increased competition from both traditional and non-traditional sources, and increased compliance requirements. Furthermore, in speaking with staff it was clear that many teams were operating at or above capacity. However, prior to adding staff in some departments, Curtis Strategy recommended that teams first evaluate workflows, revise processes, and identify systems to gain efficiencies.

In all, Curtis Strategy identified twelve areas of focus that can help improve staff and faculty morale, improve customer service, reduce redundancies, increase efficiencies, and cut costs. The culmination of our work coincided with the development of a new strategic plan. Implementation of the assessment recommendations will assist in designing a structure to solidify the foundation that supports the strategic direction.