



OWENS  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

# First Impressions Report

December 5, 2007



**Process Management**  
**First Impressions/Customer Service at Owens Community College**  
**FALL 2007**

*Team Leader:*

Chip Campbell, Assistant Director, Success Advising, Center for Teaching & Learning

*Team Co-Champions:*

Joanne Juan, Secretary to Vice President of Student Services

Marc Levy, Director, Organizational Development & Performance, Human Resources

*Team Scribe:*

Sarah Householder, Communications Coordinator, Marketing & Communications

*Team Members:*

Belinda Barr, Administrative Assistant for Performance Management, Human Resources

Ann Savage, Executive Director, Fund Development, OCC Foundation

Robin Baranski, Financial Aid Specialist

## **I. Introduction & Background**

The mission of Owens Community College is “We believe in serving our students and our community. Your success is our mission” and our vision emphasizes “excellence, innovation, and collaboration.” For the College to help students be successful, we must first be successful in creating an environment that encourages enrollment and retention, as well as supports quality teaching and learning. While our marketing department advertises our positive points (affordable tuition, small classes, experienced faculty, online classes, two campuses, etc.), the student impressions of our campus and staff are two of the most important factors affecting enrollment and retention. Raisman (2002) found that “there is a direct correlation between good customer service and the enrollment process. Colleges that are student centered and treat students as welcomed and respected customers, while making sure they get a great education, will have enrollment and retention success.”

Our team recognizes that our employees hear complaints from students and other employees describing poor customer service, as well as compliments regarding excellent customer service. These complaints damage the reputation of the institution and have serious implications for new and continuing student enrollment at the institution. At present time, there is no college-wide system in place to gather feedback from students and other external customers, as well as other employees. Some college offices/departments may have a feedback system of their own, but the data is not necessarily shared and analyzed for an overall view of institutional customer service performance. By not gathering data across campus on a continuing basis, we have no way to determine our current customer service performance or to identify what problems to solve/improvements to make to achieve exceptional customer service. In addition, serious complaints may become our only limited focus and hence the feedback that finds its way to the College administration. This can result in a skewed perception of our overall customer service performance along with failure to give proper recognition to those instances of outstanding customer service by our employees.

## **II. Project Statement**

The First Impressions/Customer Service Team will gather data through a survey of key individuals/offices to determine our strengths and weaknesses in eliciting, collecting and utilizing feedback regarding our customer service performance and to make recommendations regarding a comprehensive and continuous feedback system.

## **III. Define and Analyze the Current Situation/Process** **Operational Definitions**

**Customer Service** is defined as anticipating and responding to customer needs in a way that increases satisfaction, decreases stress, and generally enhances their experience. This would include displaying a friendly demeanor, acknowledging and responding to customer concerns/complaints in an accurate and helpful manner; quality and efficiency in response to customers; and campus signage to effectively direct new and prospective customers to Enrollment Services and academic offices.

**Internal Customers:** Owens Community College faculty, staff, and administration.

**External Customers:** Any person of any age/education/position/status in the community who may interact with Owens Community College

**Communication:** The conveyance of opinions, observations, or any other information regarding customer service at Owens Community College between departments

**Informal Feedback:** Unsolicited/spontaneous communication of feedback on customer service from Owens Community College faculty/staff/students or community contacts/resources/vendors.

**Formal Feedback Mechanism:** A pre-designed system for soliciting and collecting feedback on customer service from Owens Community College faculty/staff/students or community contacts/resources/vendors.

**Complaints/Concerns:** Instances or problems that a customer might have about the customer service they have received at Owens Community College.

### **Hypothesis**

Our hypothesis is that our institution can make data driven decisions in how to best improve our first impressions and customer services to internal and external customers through a comprehensive and continuous system of obtaining customer feedback.

### **Sampling Methods**

Our sample consisted of individuals in offices who provide direct service to students, members of the larger community, and/or other departments or constituents within Owens Community College. Individuals interviewed represented the following offices:

1. President's Office
2. Vice President of Student Services
3. College Switchboard
4. Copy Center
5. Provost's Office
6. Enrollment Services – Toledo
7. Student Services – Findlay campus
8. Bursar's Office
9. JOBS Office
10. School of Arts & Sciences
11. Success Advising
12. School of Business & Information Systems
13. Student Government
14. Disability Services
15. Office of Marketing & Communications
16. Library
17. School of Public Safety & Emergency Preparedness
18. Workforce & Community Services – Toledo
19. Workforce & Community Services – Findlay
20. Office of the Registrar
21. Financial Aid – Toledo and Findlay
22. Bookstore
23. SHAC Fitness Center

24. Security
25. Buildings & Grounds
26. The Learning Center
27. Computer Labs
28. Testing Center
29. Human Resources
30. School of Technology

### **Survey**

This is the script that team members utilized when interviewing staff members who were in the sample.

#### **Introduction:**

Hi my name is (NAME). I am on the First Impressions/Customer Service Process Management Team. We're trying to get a sense of what systems are currently being utilized around campus to collect feedback on customer service related issues. This way we won't reinvent the wheel with our recommendations by becoming more aware of what already exists. I'd like to ask you a few quick questions if you don't mind.

We are currently looking at both first impressions and the continuing customer service we give visitors, prospective students, current students, new and seasoned employees and parents. In order to better track things in the future we would like to find out about the different ways departments throughout the College collect and manage both positive and negative feedback. All the answers will be reported anonymously and only used to help improve our responses to feedback.

### **Survey Questions & Data**

For a graphical representation of the results of our survey, the reader can reference each survey item beginning on page 17.

- 1. Does your office have a formal mechanism for collecting feedback from internal and external customers, visitors and so forth? If so, what are those mechanisms? (Examples might be such things as a suggestion box, online feedback link, an identified phone number to call, etc.)**

47% of respondents reported that their office has no formal mechanism for collecting customer service feedback. 53% report using an online form, surveys, a suggestion box or some combination of these methods.

- 2. How do you typically receive informal or unplanned feedback? (Examples, if needed: face-to-face, phone, e-mail, word of mouth or hearsay)**

61% of respondents reported that they receive information through all of the following means:

Phone  
Email  
Face-to-face  
Suggestion Box  
Word of mouth

30% reported utilizing only one of the means stated above.

**3. What do you typically do with the formal information that you collect?**

Via a formal mechanism, 23% report the feedback to their supervisor while 17% state they handle it themselves and 13% discuss directly with the employee involved.

**4. What do you typically do with that informal information and do you report that information to anyone in particular?**

In regards to receiving feedback informally/unplanned, 27% report that information to their supervisor, 17% handle it themselves, 13% discuss directly with the employee involved and 10% report the feedback to a higher level administrator. We noted the importance of this data as it pertains to procedures that don't exist (or do exist but are not followed) regarding the handling of customer service related complaints about Owens Community College employees.

**5. Do you feel like you are informed enough to handle complaints properly? (For example, do you have the current information you need to respond or direct individuals through the proper channels to help them?)**

32% of the respondents report that they feel they are informed enough to handle complaints properly while 43% report most but not all of the time and 25% report that they do not feel informed enough.

**6. What types or kinds of feedback (if any) does your office typically receive from students and/or staff about customer service College-wide? (Examples, if needed: complaints about parking, getting lost, customer service, treatment of students)**

The feedback issues and percentages are as follows:

18%	Phone Problems (multiple transfers between offices)
15%	Parking
11%	Directional signage
9%	Customer service attitude
7%	Advising
7%	Communication issues
7%	Incorrect information conveyed
4%	Timeliness of response to calls/emails
4%	Security
4%	Understaffing
2%	Physical plant issues (heat, air conditioning, mold on ceiling tiles, etc.)
2%	Complaints that are unjustified and/or are beyond the control of the college
2%	Instructors
2%	New Student Orientation
2%	Catering
18%	Reports no campus-wide feedback

After reviewing this data, we felt that customer service attitude, incorrect information conveyed and understaffing combined is 21% of the respondents and should be considered as interrelated problems.

## 7. About what issues or concerns do you believe we should collect more feedback College-wide?

The issues or concerns reported and percentages are as follows:

26%	Communication
14%	Follow through
9%	Advising
6%	Parking
6%	General customer service
3%	Cafeteria
3%	Programs
3%	Enrollment process
30%	No suggestions reported

### **Online Question and Comment Form**

In our research for this project, we discovered a tool available on the Owens Community College website that, with modification, could be very valuable in eliciting customer service feedback. Unfortunately no one on our team (and almost no one else we spoke with) was aware that this page is on the website or where it is located. What follows is a description of the “Online Question and Comment Form” that is located under “Contact Us” on the website.

#### *On-Line Suggestion Boxes*

Currently there are 5 areas that can be found on the Owens Community College website when the word “suggestion box” is used in the search field: The Library, Records, Honors Program, School of Arts & Sciences and The School of Technology.

These boxes allow anonymous suggestions. Unless the person writing provides their own specific contact information, the writer is unknown as the system filters out the e-mail address of the sender.

The very bottom of the Owens website homepage has a “contact-us” link. When you open this link, you will find a question mark icon, which says: Have a question? Fill out the [Online Comment or Question Form](#). This link takes you to the web page on the next page.

Contact Us: Owens Community College, Toledo, Ohio - Mozilla Firefox

File Edit View History Bookmarks Tools Accessibility Help

https://www.owens.edu/onlineform.html

J.O.B.S. Placement O... Office of Enrollment S... Owens Student and E... Enrollment Services, ...

Disable Cookies CSS Forms Images Information Miscellaneous Outline Resize Tools View Source Options

Navigation Text Equivalents Scripting Style Validators Tools Keyboard Options

Contact Us: Owens Community C... Owens Community College: Preschool ... Owens Community College: Child Care ... Focus: Campus Directory: Results

**CONTACT US**

ABOUT OWENS

Toledo-area Campus Contact List

Findlay-area Campus Contact List

Online Comment or Question Form

Maps/Directions

### Online Comment or Question Form

*Request information from a specific area of the College.*

**Name: \***

**Email: \***

**I have a question regarding:**

- Admissions
- Advising
- Alumni Relations
- Athletics
- Bookstore
- Class Schedule
- College Admissions
- College Catalog
- Continuing Education
- Disabilities Services

**Question/Request:**

Submit Reset

\* Required fields.  
This information is requested in order for us to follow up with your inquiry. Only the specific department contact person(s) will see your information. We will not make your information public or use it for purposes not relating to this inquiry.

This form requires the sender's name and return email address. It also requires the sender to choose an area with the words: "I have a question regarding," and allows them to type their "Question/Request." The form does not specifically solicit comments. These emails all have the assigned subject "online website comment form."

The departments that are listed are tied to the e-mail address of a specific person in that area, with the exception of Records, Financial Aid, Enrollment Services and the Helpdesk. In the case of these larger areas, a particular person or persons monitor and answer the incoming e-mails.

The page is visited frequently. In a month's time, from Oct. 7 - Nov. 6, this online form was viewed 351 times, which is pretty high on the grand scheme of things when you compare it to other pages on our website. For example, the Alumni homepage had 371 page views, which is only 20 more than the online form and the Alumni page has a big button on the Owens homepage.

An informal phone survey to the areas or persons that receive these e-mails revealed that almost all of the messages are questions or requests. There may be an occasional complaint, but nothing that stands out. The e-mails are all someone looking for something.

Brad Meyer, Director of Public and Media Relations, stated that all e-mails he receives from the online comment form are questions. He also receives a significant amount of question/request e-mails from press releases regardless of their age. He suspects that people use the Owens web internet search on a topic such as "train conductor," the press release appears and his contact information is given. Owens no longer offers this program, but people are finding it and contacting him for information. He felt that he receives a higher volume of inquiring e-mails than calls for information on both business phone and cell phone combined.

Carla Striker, Webmaster, confirms that this form has been available through our website for "years and years." It was formerly visible in the red column on the left of the page, but was moved to the contact page at least two years ago. Higher visibility usually leads to a higher volume of usage. Although this form receives nearly as many users as the Alumni page with the higher visible button, it is not openly soliciting comments that tell us how we are doing.

Many areas of the college may not be aware of the On-Line Comment Form (note - the team members were not even aware this form existed until this project). Especially considering that 47% of the offices/departments surveyed responded that they had no formal mechanism for collecting feedback.

Soliciting customer feedback, good or bad, allows us to assess areas of concern we may otherwise overlook. Or keeps us from "fixing" something that already works, something people really like.

Asking stakeholders to comment may open up a soapbox for ranting blogs, but the context of the rant may be consistent with other comments or concerns and should be assessed accordingly.

### **Current Phone Training Methods and Practices**

Phone training is part of the New Employee Orientation. The actual phone training portion is conducted by Deb Edwards, Owens Switchboard Supervisor. Deb's training is primarily basic technical training on how to use our phone system. Handouts include:

- Understanding the OptiGuide (the phone itself)

- Xpressions 3.0 Unified Messaging Quick Reference Guide (voice mail, call forwarding, transferring, conference calls, etc.)
- Xpressions Tips and Tricks (short-cuts).

Additional phone training is conducted by the Human Resources Office as part of their customer service training. This training focuses on the following areas of phone etiquette:

- The preferred way to answer an Owens phone – “Owens Community College, this is Jane of Enrollment Services, How may I help you”
  - The preferred way to place a caller on hold – ask them first, don’t just throw the caller on hold
  - Preferred transfer methods – to stay on the line and say “ I have a transfer call”
- These skills are basic manners and good customer service practices for any institution or business.

### **Improved Phone Training Suggestions**

Survey results indicate that a number one source for frustration of callers is how many times they get transferred. Not only is this frustrating but the caller begins to think “does anybody know what they are talking about or doing there at Owens?”

Advanced phone training techniques could include useful tips and information compiled by experienced Owens personnel such as:

- How to ask qualifying questions to determine the exact need of the caller.
- Successfully handling an irate caller.
- Knowing when NOT to transfer; determining if you should listen to the caller, get the basic information on why they are calling, obtain their contact information, and let them know that you or someone who can assist them will return their call.
- Reminding everyone that ***although you may repeat the same thing several hundred times a day, the person calling is asking and hearing the information for the very first time.***
- A frequently asked questions or FAQ sheet can be developed to assist everyone.

Advanced phone training techniques shouldn’t take a long time to demonstrate and learn and, when practiced, will pay off big in customer satisfaction and improved employee morale. It enables the employee to gain some knowledge and experience for future callers, boosting self confidence. A win-win situation: satisfied customers and enlightened self-confident employees. This *excellent* customer *service* adds to the *learning* experience of the employee. It’s *collaborative* in nature, and although not really *innovative*, may be a new technique worth the effort!

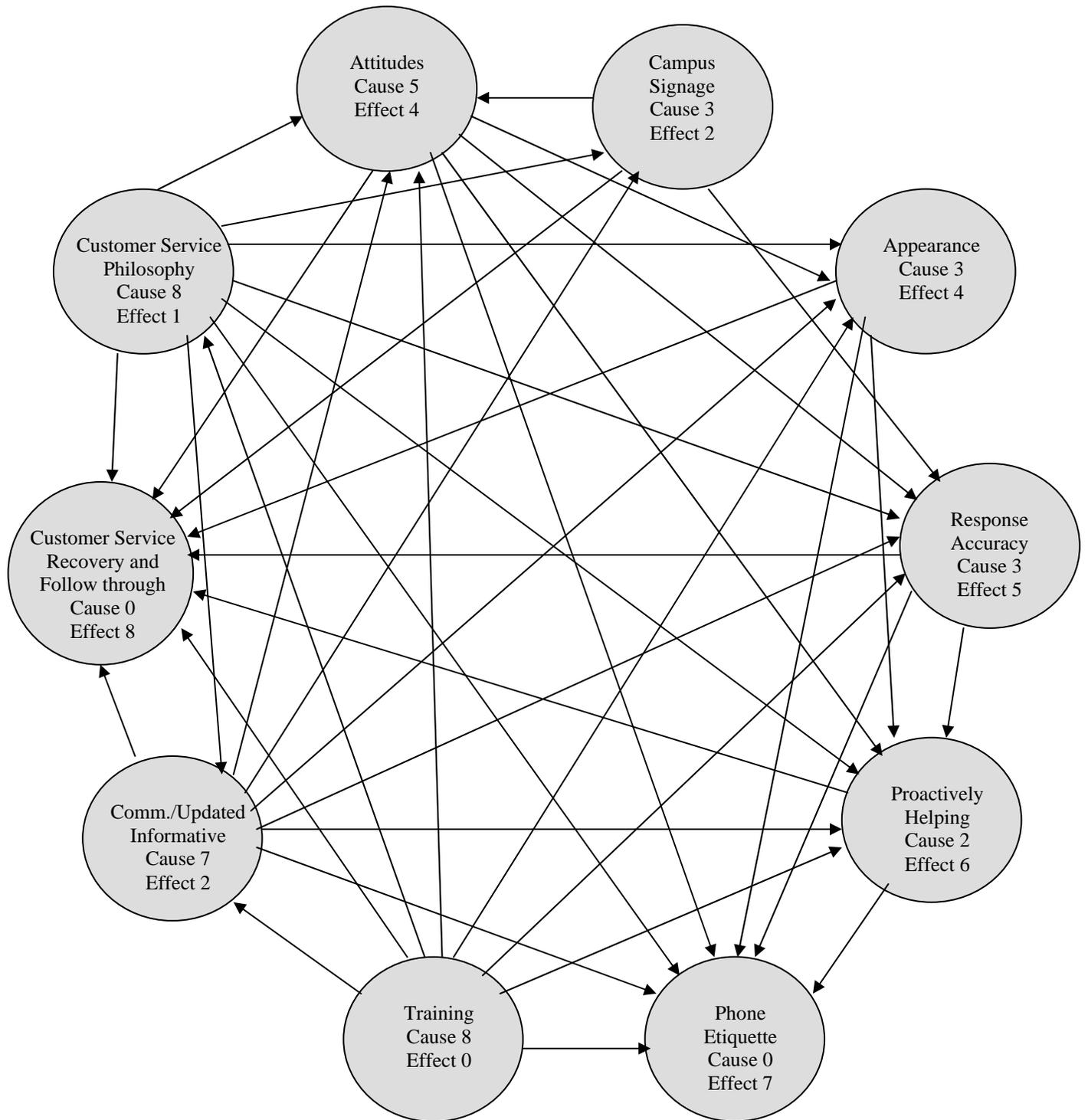
## **IV. Analyze Causes for Current Outcomes**

The Relationship/Cause and Effect Diagram shows that our customer service philosophy, training, and communications affect all the other elements of customer service. These other key elements include:

Response Accuracy	Attitudes	Campus Signage	Appearance	Proactively Helping
Phone Etiquette	Customer Service Recovery and Follow Through			

We believe that when our philosophy, training, and communications are improved, the remaining key elements will also improve.

**Relationship/Cause and Effect Diagram**  
**Key Elements to Improve Customer Service**



## V. Improvement Theory & Implementation Plan

### Improvements in line with AQIP Criteria

Our project keeps in mind the core values of Owens Community College: Service, Learning, Innovation, Collaboration and Excellence. The criteria for an AQIP project are supportive of these core values. The improvements recommended in this project meet AQIP criteria and reflect the core values of our institution.

Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs: Understanding and validation of the complaints, concerns and compliments from students and other external customers is essential in achieving excellence.

Valuing People: Students and other external and internal customers feel valued when their complaints and concerns are examined, considered and resolved (whenever possible) by the College.

Leading and Communicating: We cannot possibly lead an organization to excellence with our focusing on service to and collaboration with out internal and external customers.

Supporting Institutional Operations: Understanding the keys to providing excellent customer service can only contribute positively to institutional operations running more smoothly and efficiently.

Planning Continuous Improvements: By continually striving to better serve students and avert/resolve problems we are continuously planning ways to improve our performance.

Building a Collaborative Culture: We move to create a collaborative culture at the College by considering that everyone is a customer of Owens Community College (students and potential students and their families, the Owens Community College faculty, staff, administration, the Northwest Ohio community as a whole).

Measuring Effectiveness: We cannot know how well we are doing at serving our customers unless we are asking/soliciting input on how we are doing.

Accomplishing Other Distinct Objectives: If we listen to our customers and provide better customer service to students, they are more likely to listen to us as we attempt to collaborate with them in achieving other objectives in the College's strategic plan.

Helping Students Learn: When students feel heard, valued and respected, they will feel more connected to and satisfied with Owens Community College. This feeling can only add positively to their learning experience at the College.

## Force Field Analysis

### Desired Change: Good First Impressions

Driving Forces	Restraining Forces
Increase/Retain Enrollment	Poor attitudes - job burn out, low morale
Good Reputation Community Wide	Recognition that there may be a problem
Ease of Use	Collecting the data; comments, compliments, suggestions, areas of concern
Appearance	Addressing issues, recovery time Who's going to be responsible?
Welcoming/ Inviting Atmosphere	How will areas or individuals in need of improvement be positively approached?
Pride of Ownership- Employee self worth & morale up = positive attitudes, desire to be helpful	How will areas or individuals that do well or excel be recognized? Communication
Exceptional Service	

#### Team Recommendations

1. Develop and implement an advanced phone training seminar to be given as part of the existing customer service training. The training should include examples from real life and will be developed by Owens senior, front line customer service representatives. Training will focus on providing accurate and timely information, trouble shooting difficult calls and reducing transfers and trainers would serve as mentors for new employees.
2. Create an easy to use, short guide or FAQ sheet for all employees to have to better serve callers and update it on a regular basis.
3. Update existing contact section on the Web site to include an online suggestion box to be monitored by the Customer Service Committee. Updated suggestion box should be moved to a more visible area on the site.

4. Form a committee to work with Human Resources and each school/division at the College to create a comprehensive customer feedback process that looks at both ongoing feedback and periodic snapshots.
5. We recommend that the committee implement a formalized and standardized customer feedback process institution-wide.

The committees' scope should focus on:

- Analyzing customer feedback methods
- Secret shoppers and mystery callers if needed
- Process for communicating feedback
- Methods for sharing positive feedback and opportunities for improvement
- Methods for improving from negative feedback
- Investigate a reward/recognition program
- Look at ways to reform the culture of customer service
- Improve process of updating staff on key changes such as personnel, policies and procedures
- Update Phone training
- Review existing Foundations of Excellence data

### **Costs**

The costs for implementing this project would be relatively small. The main costs are the time costs associated with the committee members and phone trainers. We anticipate a committee made up of the current process management team members and representatives from across campus that would total a committee of 10-15 individuals. Each committee member should be able to commit approximately two hours on a monthly basis for committee meeting and preparation time. A few core committee members (four to five) would spend slightly more time compiling existing data and reviewing Web site changes, we anticipate those committee members would spend an additional four hours per month reviewing data.

In addition to the staff needed for the committee, staff will also be required to develop and implement advanced phone training. We anticipate approximately four trainers would spend about 10 hours preparing the training and fact sheet and an additional hour per month for implementing the training. Because the training will be integrated into the existing customer service training there will be no additional training costs with implementation. There will be the cost of printing a black and white, one-page fact sheet for all support and professional staff. This will be approximately \$60.00 and will need to be updated at least three times a year.

Any additional costs will be researched and examined for feasibility by the committee and will be reported at the steering committee update in the spring.

### **Anticipated positive results impacting customers**

#### **Recommendation 1: Phone Training Seminar**

The phone training seminar would help eliminate multiple transfers and lower the frustration of customers who cannot seem to reach the right person to assist them. Reducing multiple transfers

will ensure that customers have their questions addressed quickly and by the person trained to best answer their inquiries. It also saves the customer time.

**Recommendation 2:** Short guide to help employees answering calls from customers

This recommendation has two benefits: the customer saves time by getting an answer to their question quickly and with the least amount of frustration and uncertainty. But the employee benefits as well because the guide will shorten their time with the customer finding either the correct answer or the right person to answer the question.

**Recommendation 3:** Update the current contact section on the website to include an online suggestion box.

Customers who have either a poor or very good experience may have trouble finding a place to send feedback. A very visible web contact section with an online suggestion box enables customers to send feedback without actually having to mail a letter or make a call, both of which require the person to find the right receiver for either the letter or the phone call. The time factor in providing feedback often prevents customers from taking the time to send in comments. The online suggestion box solves those problems giving the customer the feeling that Owens is actually seeking their opinions about their experiences at the College.

**Recommendation 4:** Form a committee to work with Human Resources and each school/division at the College to create a comprehensive customer feedback process.

A comprehensive customer feedback process will ensure the widest variety of feedback. This feedback can then be sent to the proper channels to actually put together processes for improving customer service, which will benefit the customers of each department.

**Recommendation 5:** A formalized and standardized customer feedback process institution-wide.

A formalized and standardized customer feedback process will ensure that feedback is sought and received everywhere on campus and the customer feedback leads to improvements in various departments. It will also help employees to become more focused on service delivery.

### Implementation Chart (Gantt Chart)

Activity	January 2008	Feb. 2008	March 2008	April 2008	May 2008	June 2008	July 2008	Aug. 2008	Sep. 2008	Oct. 2008	Nov. 2008	Dec. 2008
FAQ sheet												
Monthly committee meetings												
Recruit trainers for advanced phone training												
Develop training model for advanced phone training												
Implement advanced phone training												
Implement Web site changes												
Collect existing FOE data												
Collect existing data from across campus												
Analyze data from Web site												
Evaluate outcomes and determine next steps												
Updated report to Steering Committee												

## **VI. Engrafting Improvements into the System and Study Results Plan**

The customer service process will be engrafted into the system through the formation of a ongoing committee. The committee will be comprised of representatives from departments throughout the College and buy-in will be high. The committee will regularly review and analyze data, communicate results to the College community, and recommend improvements in the process. This will be an all-inclusive group who will work to implement methods that work for all departments and areas and will be better able to serve the College by getting feedback from all areas.

The results will be studied on a monthly basis by the committee. This will allow the team members to constantly evaluate and respond to the feedback on a consistent basis. After the data and methodology is reviewed, the customer service plan and training can be adjusted in a quick and easy fashion.

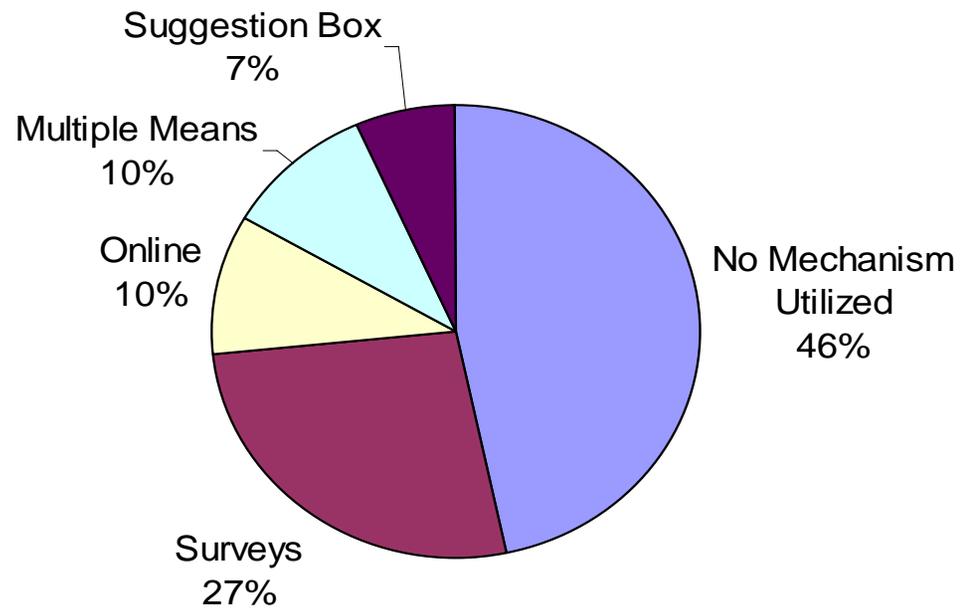
## **VII. Acknowledgments**

There are several people who assisted with the work of the First Impressions/Customer Service Process Management Team. We would like to thank all of our survey respondents who took the time to be interviewed and provide the honest and detailed answers which lead us to our recommendations. We are grateful for the help provided by Deb Edwards on phone training, which was invaluable and Lesta Mizer of the copy center for assisting us in putting the report together. We are grateful for the assistance of our co-champions, Dr. Marc Levy and Joanne Juan. We appreciate their valuable insights and help. And finally, we want to thank Dr. Stan Jensen for leading us through the process of process management.

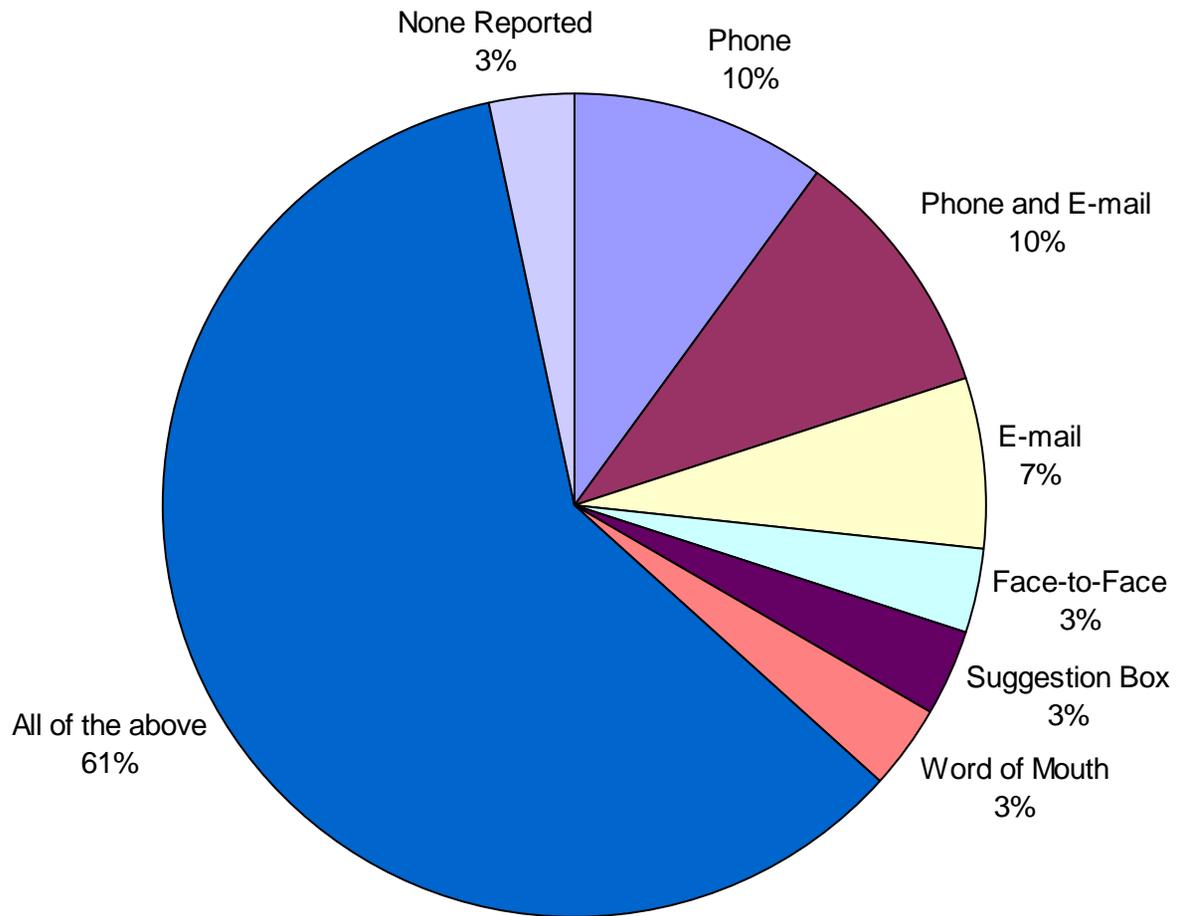
## **VIII. References**

Raisman, N.: *Embrace the Oxymoron: Customer Service in Higher Education*, LRP Publications. 2002.

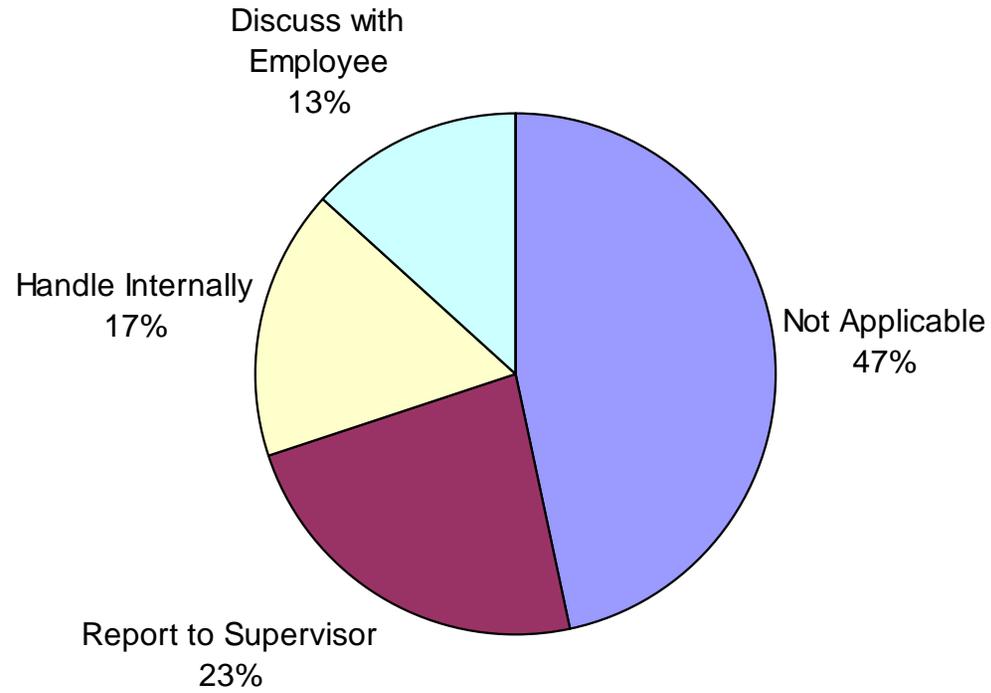
**Question #1: What is your formal mechanism for collecting customer service feedback?**



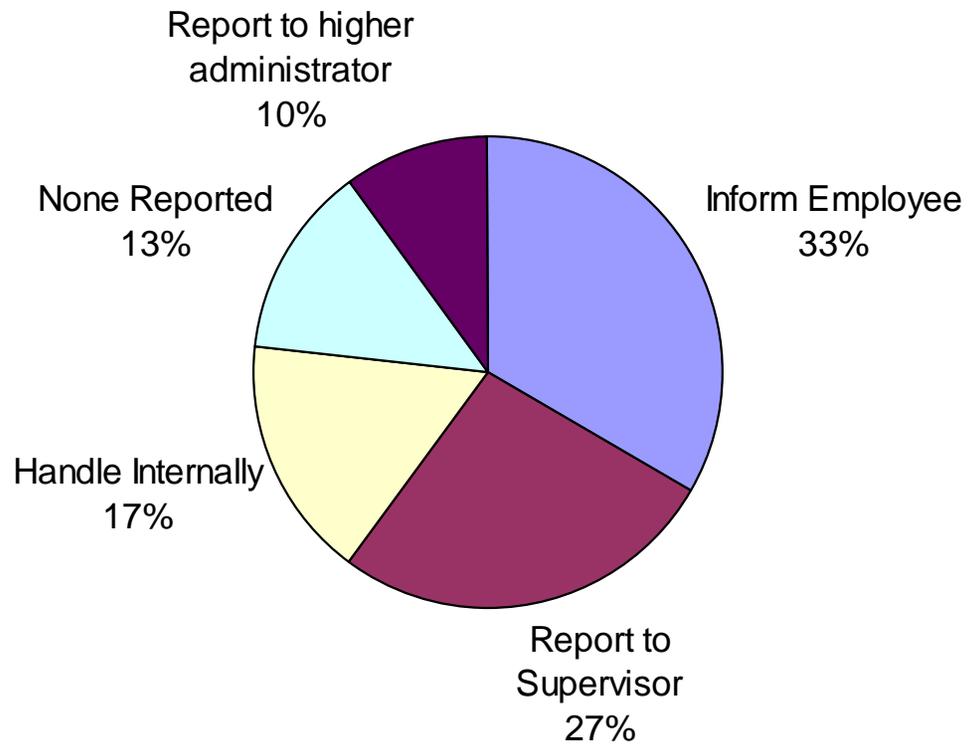
**Question #2: How do you receive informal customer service feedback?**



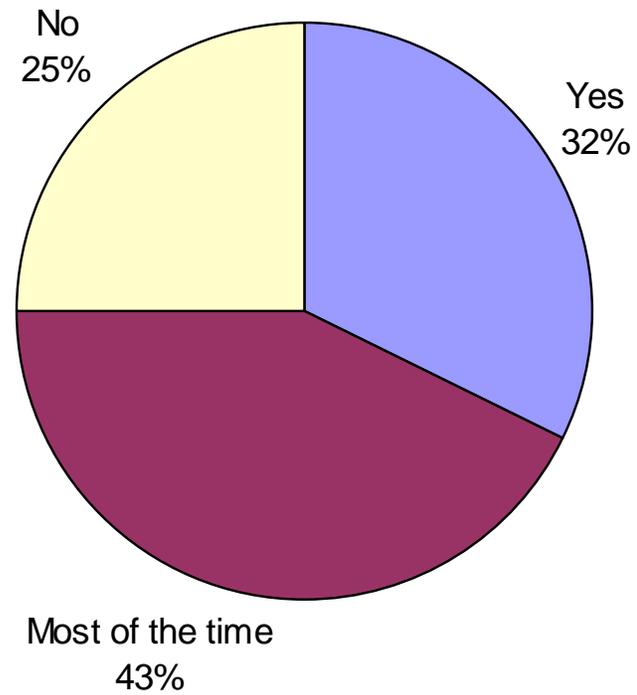
**Question #3: What do you do with the customer service information you collect?**



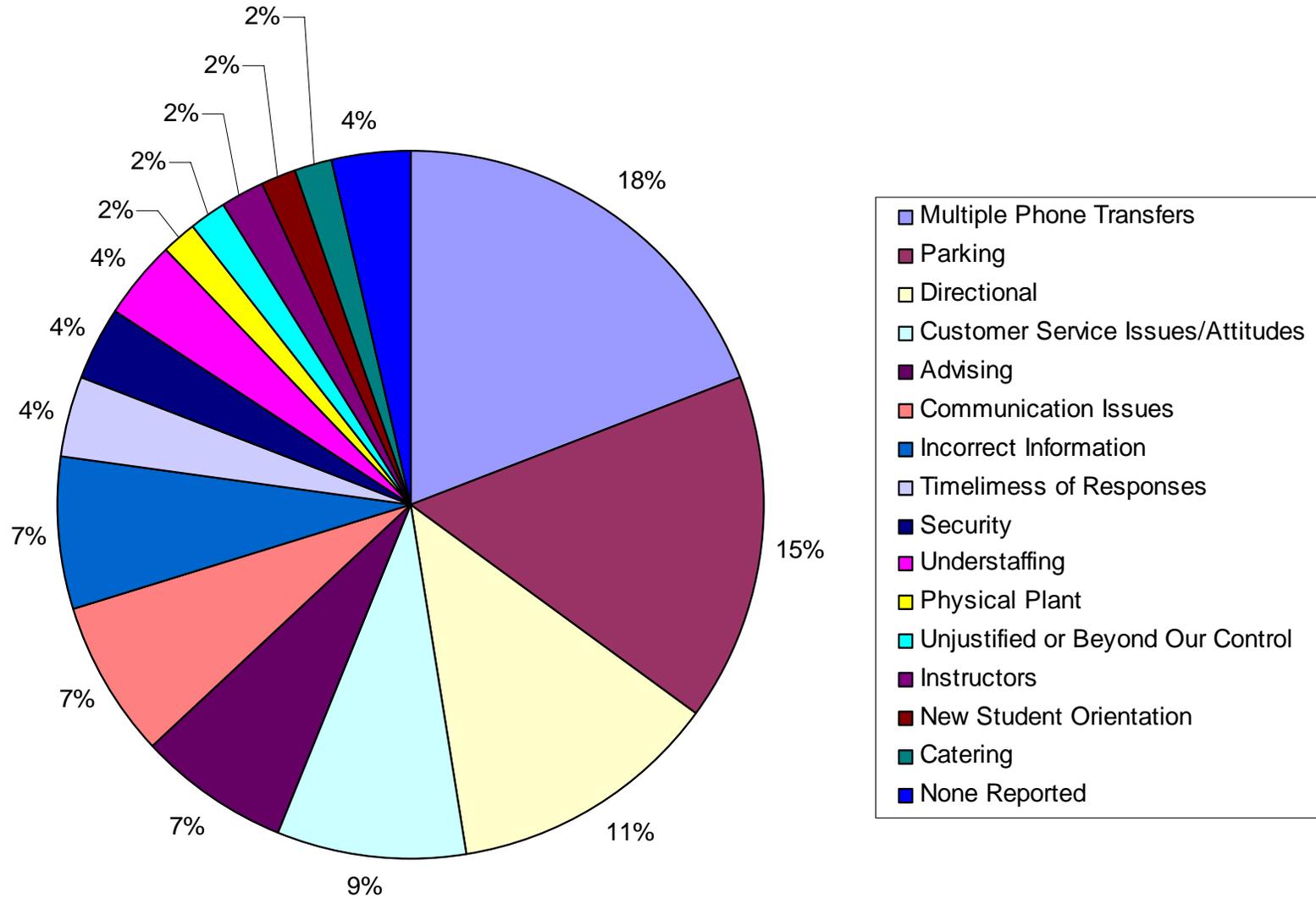
**Question #4: What do you do with the customer service information received informally?**



**Question #5: Do you feel like you are informed enough to handle customer service complaints properly?**



**Question #6: What types or kinds of feedback do you hear about customer service campus-wide?**



**Question #7: About what issues or concerns do you believe we should collect more feedback College-wide?**

