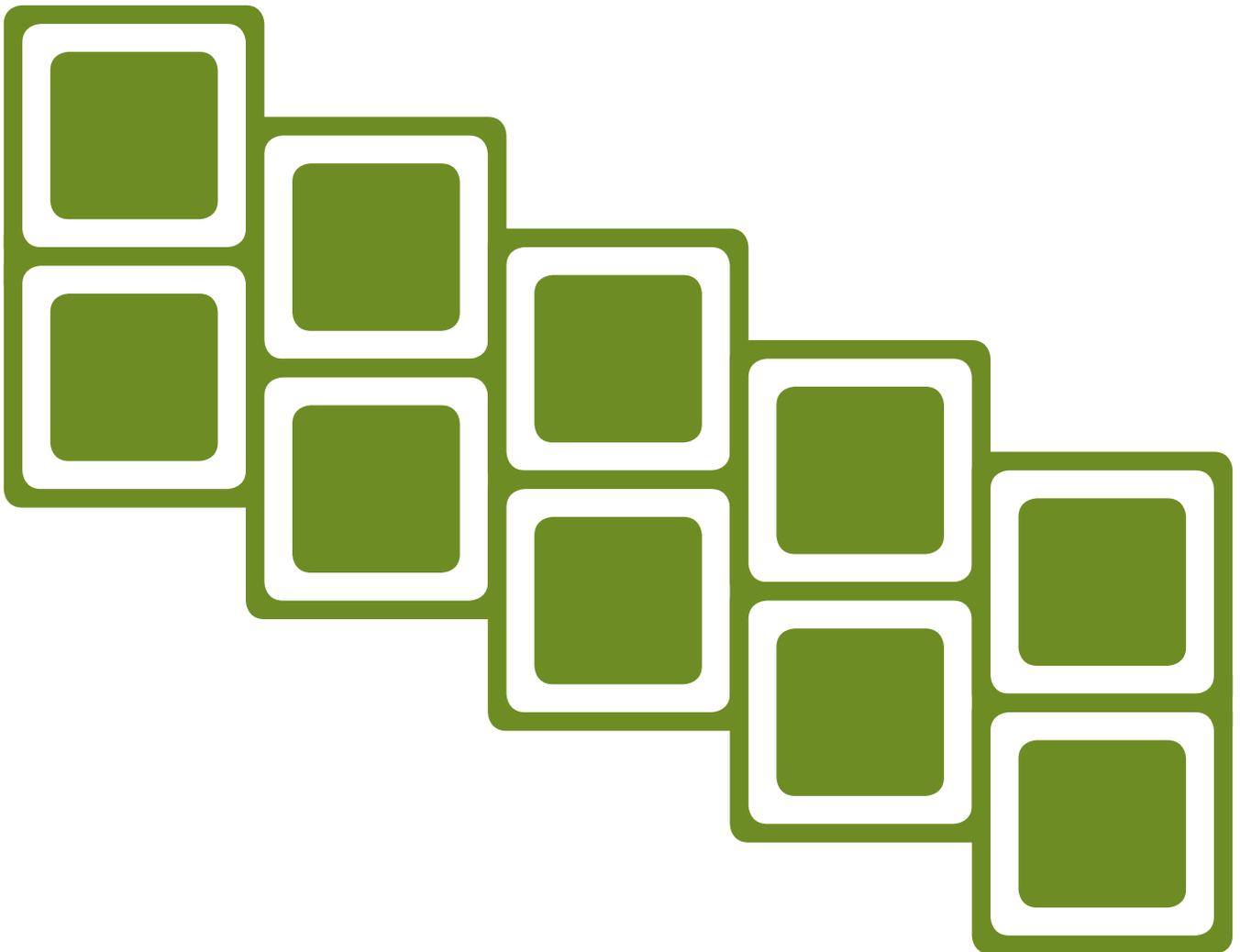


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# *Improving Summer Session Efficiencies: A Case Study*

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## **Abstract**

Nevada was one of the hardest-hit states during the recent financial crisis and is still far behind the rest of the country in recovery (Luhby, 2012). Since 2008, the Nevada System of Higher Education has seen a 20.3% decrease in state support (Palmer, 2012). With state funds significantly reduced and funding required for student success initiatives on an increase, Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC) found itself needing to maximize the generation of non-state funds. One area that had great potential as an excellent source of non-state funds was summer session. Although TMCC's summer session had always been run as a self-supporting entity, it had not been run under a profit- (surplus-) generating business model. When internal reorganization had left the summer session program without a dedicated administrator, it was decided that the dean of business would take on that role. This decision was made specifically so summer session would be run as a surplus-generating business.

The transition from the past— which had seen summer session less as a value to the institution and more as a value to participating faculty—to a model that works within the policy to maximize returns to the institution, provide fair compensation to faculty, and ensure that student needs are met, has been wrought with a number of challenges. This paper reviews the process and outcomes, including the major opportunities and challenges in the three years since the transition took place.

## Introduction

The financial success of Truckee Meadows Community College's (TMCC) summer session started with a focus on student success and an economic crisis. TMCC is a comprehensive community college located in Reno, Nevada, and is part of the Nevada System of Higher Education. The college serves more than 28,000 students each year in credit and non-credit programs at five college sites and more than 20 community locations. Offering academic and university transfer, occupational training, career enhancement workshops, and classes just for fun, TMCC is the fastest-growing college in northern Nevada (TMCC Public Information, 2013).

In 2008, TMCC hired a new president whose focus on student success resulted in the establishment of many new initiatives to help first-time college students achieve success. Two of these initiatives were the Summer Bridge and Success First programs, which were piloted with grant funding. These initiatives, as well as others, produced excellent results; graduation rates doubled in three years, and the institution exceeded its Complete College America goal in 2011 by 22%.

The grant funding for these initiatives was coming to an end at an unfortunate time. The need to institutionalize these initiatives coincided with one of the worst financial crises in American history since the Great Depression. During this financial crisis, Nevada was one of the hardest-hit states and is still far behind the rest of the country in recovery (Luhby, 2012). Since 2008, the Nevada System of Higher Education has seen a 20.3% decrease in state support (Palmer, 2012), with TMCC sustaining a 30% reduction in state funding. Community colleges were hit particularly hard, and there was grave concern over how TMCC was going to institutionalize the Summer Bridge and Success First programs.

## Summer School Background

The TMCC summer program was established more than 30 years ago. The summer program consists of two five-week sessions, with some course offerings outside of that when required under special circumstances. As a result of internal reorganization, summer session was moved under the Division of Business as the dean's direct responsibility so that a more entrepreneurial approach, with a goal of maximizing surplus, could be applied. The dean's experience included more than 18 years in the corporate arena and running her own business for six years.

The first year, 2009, was a transition year, with the new structure applied in March, thus leaving the new leadership in only a caretaker role. The second year saw initial positive steps taking place, which included changes to schedule distribution, document reviews, and meetings with faculty leadership. It was decided to discontinue mass printing and distribution of the Summer Schedule and move it online (Academic Advising continues to receive printed schedules), which saw a savings of more than \$8,000. The summer salary code was reviewed to determine its proper and acceptable interpretation, and this interpretation was approved by the institution's legal counsel. Separate meetings were held with the Faculty-Senate leadership and the Nevada Faculty Alliance campus representative.

The summer program management was just one of many responsibilities of the dean and her executive assistant. In order to facilitate the process, a number of reports were created that would enable a streamlined review of costs and revenues. Revenues were calculated from the number of students times the number of credits times the cost per credit, while full-time faculty salary was based on 1.9% times the spring contract amount times the contact hours. To deal with the information required, the executive assistant developed a comprehensive spreadsheet that determined a break-even point for each class, based on the faculty member assigned to that class. The increased monitoring, enabled by the constantly updated reports, resulted in positive financial results, with a 70% increase in net profits for the first year of implementation.

## Mistakes Made

Some initial missteps included a lack of communication—to the department chairs and faculty—of the changes relating to salary, scheduling, and enrollment caps. The dean had never managed a summer program before. In addition, she came from a university where summer teaching assignments saw the full-time and part-time faculty treated equally, and summer teaching was seen as a choice made by faculty rather than an assumed addition to full-time faculty contracts. The dean therefore neglected to apply change management communication techniques in the first year. This created confusion that could easily have been avoided with proper communication.

## Salary Statement

One of the most important issues that should have been communicated more clearly was the interpretation of the remuneration policy. The summer salary statement was created by the Budget and Monetary Sub-committee of Faculty Senate, approved by Faculty–Senate, and then approved by the Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents. The section of the salary statement from the NSHE Board of Regents Handbook (2010) pertinent to the change reads:

Should enrollment in an instructor's summer classes fail to produce the revenues necessary to hold all of their classes or cover the instructor's salary for all of their classes, the President or her designee may, in lieu of cancelation, negotiate and establish a mutually agreeable rate less than the maximum provided above for each instructor. (p. 20)

The administrator who previously managed the summer program would look at the departments as a whole in relation to a breakeven point. In following the salary statement as published in the Board of Regents handbook, that administrator had used each individual faculty member's revenue generated from all of his/her classes to determine whether the salary could be covered without the need for negotiation. In her interpretation of the policy, the dean decided that no class would be allowed to run at a loss, hence the negotiated salary amount for any faculty member would not be more than the revenue generated by that faculty member. This decision, in particular, raised a few questions with a number of faculty, as they were not happy with the resulting impact on their remuneration.

Another main issue surrounding salary arose from courses with labs. The salary statement uses the term “credit hour,” and those courses with lab classes calculate fall and spring workload on “contact hour.” In addition, with a number of lab classes, there is a difference between the number of credit hours for which a student pays and the number of contact hours that are taught.

## Scheduling

Scheduling was another area that created a stumbling block. Historically, the schedule was driven by faculty requesting to teach certain classes in summer. This had resulted in a lot of class cancellations due to low enrollment or in classes running at a financial loss to the college.

## Enrollment Caps

Class enrollment caps were also an issue. Some faculty who had traditionally set a low cap on their classes realized that even full enrollment would not generate the revenue needed to sustain their full remuneration, based on the salary formula. Also, changes in class enrollment numbers after the start of a session had faculty questioning their negotiated remuneration.

## Improvements

In response to the stumbling blocks, a number of corrective measures were implemented. Many meetings with the departments where classes with labs were housed resulted in a compromise that summer salary would be based on “contact hours” for all classes but would still be held to the “need to generate enough revenue to cover the instructor’s salary” requirement.

Responding to the scheduling issues, the dean prepared a summer session internal document (TMCC, 2010) that included this recommended practice:

Decisions for scheduling classes for Summer need to be supported by

- Successfully running the two previous summers (not cancelled).
- Data showing that the preceding Spring semester left at least 20 students unserved who were trying to enroll in the class. Requests for exceptions will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by the Summer School Dean and must be approved by the VPAA. (p. 2)

This recommendation focused on a student-need-driven approach to scheduling, the same methodology used for the spring and fall semesters. The change resulted in significantly fewer cancellations and better fill rates for summer classes. Also, enrollment caps were set by faculty with prior knowledge of the salary statement, and that resolved most of the issues relating to the enrollment cap stumbling block.

In addition to scheduling, communication needed to be improved. The dean attended the department chairs meetings and presented all desired changes as draft proposals, seeking the chairs’ input. The input was then incorporated into the final document that was used to brief

administrators and faculty. This document communicated the census dates and times (which resolved the issue of change in enrollment after salary was negotiated), the salary statements, the scheduling process, and a recommendation that a lottery system be used to schedule faculty when there were more faculty who wanted to teach than the number of sections being offered. In the past, the senior faculty had dominated the roster for summer, leaving little opportunity for newer faculty to teach.

To facilitate summer-session management, along with the more direct and open communication, more community input was obtained; opinion leaders from within the faculty were identified and collaborated with to screen ideas prior to releasing them for overall community input. Most importantly, the guiding principles of fairness, equitability, and transparency were and will continue to be paramount to success.

## Recommendations

**Communication and Inclusion.** Identify everyone who may be impacted by the change, and prepare detailed information in both written and verbal formats to share with them—first in a draft form to obtain input and then in a final form to use as guidelines.

**Transparency and Equity.** If you can demonstrate that everyone receives the same treatment, it is much easier to gain support across campus.

**Triple Bottom Line.** It is important for everyone to support a triple bottom line that takes into account the need for the institution, the faculty, and the students to benefit from the summer program. With the profits being used to fund student success, the student body were better prepared. In the end, what better benefit is there for faculty than well-prepared students in their classes?

## Conclusions

The lessons learned from the overall change management process that was undertaken can be applied to most situations in higher education as well as business. Thakar (2012) presents a list of activities that a leader should undertake to effect change in a positive way, in which he highlights the importance of communication, transparency, and equity.

The outcome of this journey, which was littered with challenges, has been well worth it for the institution. In 2012, 380 classes were offered, taught by 73 full-time and 91 part-time faculty, serving 3,717 students from a schedule that was driven by student need. Summer session has gone from a breakeven or loss position to being a strong surplus center, realizing a greater than 118% increase in surplus from 2009 to 2012. These funds enabled the college to institutionalize its Summer Bridge and Success First student success initiatives, which have now served more than 1,500 students.

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## Biography

Marie Murgolo-Poore, dean, Division of Business, Truckee Meadows Community College, is also responsible for summer school, ABE/ESL, customized training, and workforce development/continuing education. Prior to joining TMCC in 2007, Marie was a tenured academic at Curtin University of Technology, Western Australia. She holds a PhD, Masters of Commerce, and Bachelor of Arts degrees.