

**QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION:
ABSTRACTS PREPARED DURING THE 1995-1996 ACADEMIC YEAR**

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Research Program in Social and Organizational Learning
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PREFACE

The Research Program in Social and Organizational Learning at The George Washington University hosts visiting professors for periods of several months or an academic year. In the 1995-1996 academic year, the Research Program hosted eight visiting professors. Four were from Russia, and were part of the Junior Faculty Development Program. Three were part of the Regional Scholars Exchange Program. These programs are funded by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. One visiting scholar from St. Gallen, Switzerland, was not part of a U.S. Government program. Each visiting professor is assigned a GW faculty member as a mentor.

The Research Program hosted a conference on U.S. Aid to Russia in February 1996. The visiting scholars attended this conference and helped with local arrangements. Two presentations were made at the annual Faculty Research Forum of the Washington Consortium of Business Schools. The Forum was held at Catholic University, April 20, 1996. Abstracts 1 and 2 were presented at the Faculty Research Forum. The third abstract, also on the subject of quality improvement, was for a keynote address at the Western Regional Government Total Quality Management Conference, Los Angeles, CA, September 8-10, 1993.

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Continuous Improvement and the Support of Scholarly Research and Development

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This presentation reports on work by the Research and Faculty Development Committee of the Quality and Innovation Initiative of the School of Business and Public Management (SBPM). The Committee's defined mission is to identify ways in which SBPM could support excellence in teaching and life-long learning; excellence in research and the creation of new knowledge; and the intellectual and professional development of faculty. In December of 1995, a survey was conducted of SBPM faculty members to identify differing needs of faculty throughout the life cycle of their academic careers at the School. The Committee believed that the variation of faculty member needs by discipline and foci is the strength of the School and should be supported wherever possible. The survey was designed to identify individual needs and to collect data on how well faculty members participated in the study, with almost a third in each career stage (assistant/associate/full professor). Two sets of issues were identified for the improvement of members, in terms of organizational, technical and financial resources, and longer-term cultural issues within the organization which would reinforce the process improvements to be initiated. The data in this study did bring to light variations of support needed by faculty members at different stages in the life cycle of an academic career, as well as faculty members' perceptions of the current SBPM initiatives intended to support their research endeavors.

The presentation highlights the challenges of employing quality principles and processes to support creative efforts of faculty and to foster faculty development. Process changes as well as long term cultural changes in the environment will be identified for discussion.

A Quality Improvement Effort in a School of Management

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In the fall of 1994 the School of Business and Public Management at The George Washington University began an organized quality improvement effort. We shall report on the issues we have addressed while initiating this effort, the decisions we have made, and the reasons for those decisions. In conjunction with the quality effort the School has developed a mission statement, a three-year plan, and specific goals and objectives.

In the first year we worked on achieving visible results early and did some training using in-house instructors. Speakers were brought in from other organizations. In the second year the effort was expanded and institutionalized. Issues we have encountered have been how to coordinate training with process improvement and how to clarify what quality improvement is and is not. There have been a number of issues related to integrating the quality effort into other initiatives in the School, for example broadening the mission of the school, assisting a re-accreditation effort, and expanding the use of information technology. We have gradually become more involved with other people in the university who are also engaged in quality improvement efforts. So far our activities have focused more on services for students and staff and on administrative efforts than on curriculum.

The Historical Context of Total Quality Management

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The quality movement is a step in the direction of putting management on a scientific and professional foundation, somewhat similar to what has already happened with medicine and engineering. All three cases -- medicine, engineering, and management -- have followed a three stage process. In the first stage an art is learned through apprenticeship. At this stage fads and quackery are common, because there are no widely accepted procedures or institutions to test the claims of talented salesmen. In the second stage scientific studies use controlled experiments to separate what is genuinely valuable from what is merely traditional or fashionable. In the third stage a profession is characterized by a widely accepted understanding of fundamentals, a process for generating new knowledge, and continuous improvement in advanced practice.