UC SANTA BARBARA
THE Current

September 14, 2020
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Collaboration, Empowerment and Learning

What began as a solution for digital transformation has morphed into a program that empowers campus departments to learn and collaborate to achieve process improvement.

Led by the College of Letters and Science Information Technology (LSIT) Process Innovation team, the program has 33 active projects for 12 departments queued for the fiscal year 2020-21. And with remote work accelerating the need for digital transformation, the team shows no signs of slowing down, either.

As one of the seven visions of the UCSB Mission-Focused IT Strategy, digital transformation embodies the steps by which inefficient processes are reworked into efficient, effective processes.

In addition to helping departments streamline processes for better workflows, the team has empowered departments and employees, and began a ripple effect that went beyond UC Santa Barbara.

“UCSB’s Process Innovation Team is one of the golden jewels of our campus,” said Graduate Staff Advisor Tricia Taylor. “They truly listen to understand your goals, connect you to others for successful collaboration and implementation, and then share the knowledge/processes so all campus members can benefit. They don’t tell you ‘what’ to do, but rather, help you decide what works best for your particular

needs."

Yann Ricard, a graduate program coordinator with the Department of Earth Science, said the team “always has my back.”

“They have such an obvious desire to help, a willingness to listen, and a keen interest in finding better ways, bridging technical knowledge and human factors. We are lucky to have them.”

While the LSIT Process Innovation team has a record of accomplishments across campus, its success is rooted in a small team that practices collaboration and shared knowledge. The team includes Program Manager of Process Innovation and Continuous Management Lisa Hall, Business Systems Analysts Eura Szuwalski and Dawn Gregory and Joseph Hyun and Joy Yi, digital marketing and data analyst interns.

Hall discovered her passion for empowering departments and improving processes when she landed in Purchasing and took part in the implementation of the FlexCard program, which won the UC Award for Best Program in 2005.

The LSIT Process Innovation team grew from a grassroots effort towards digitizing signatures and agreements. Once team members realized the program’s scope was much larger than one solution, however, they took the initiative to learn how that knowledge could best serve other departments as well as the campus’s overall mission.

“Through uniting extraordinary talent and knowledge of campus experts, improved business processes will evolve,” Hall said.

Using Lean Six Sigma methodology, the team consults with department requesters to set goals, visualize a final outcome and find the root cause of the inefficiency in question. Hall and Szuwalski possess Lean Six Sigma Green Belts; Gregory completed hers in August 2020. Like martial arts, advancing in Lean Six Sigma requires meeting criteria to achieve different levels; the White Belt, Yellow Belt, Green Belt, Black Belt, and Master Black Belt.

“When a customer reaches out to us with a problem or issue, we begin with a face-to-face discovery meeting to define the problem, prioritize their goals and begin the mapping of the process,” Hall said. “We inspire them to become a part of the

continuous improvement.”

The primary goal of the Process Innovation team is to empower departments through collaboration of shared knowledge to increase efficiency and reduce waste using continuous improvement and project management techniques such as Lean Six Sigma.

One of the most important aspects of the Process Innovation team’s success is ensuring that members use their skills, knowledge and background to learn, grow and inspire change as individuals and collectively, as a group. Szuwalski’s background is in library science, while Gregory earned a degree in philosophy.

“Different backgrounds make us stronger,” Szuwalski said. “The fact that we sit in IT and are part of an IT unit, it shows the strength of our team and various skill sets.”

Szuwalski began her career on the GauchoSpace team as a learning management services support technician, working directly with students and faculty and training them so they had everything they needed to accomplish their tasks.

“Our whole model has always been to train the trainer. We really had to start thinking of each process as a mini-project.”

She said that as part of continuous improvement and process innovation, the team selects a champion in each department, usually the person that requested assistance. Future goals include addressing more campus-wide processes, including accounting, purchasing and reimbursement systems, and student processes in partnership with the Division of Student Affairs. An on-hold project in the campus’s advising community has already connected groups across different colleges, forming connections that didn’t exist before.

“It’s a big part of Digital Transformation,” Szuwalski said. “We want to improve the student experience by automating and connecting them with systems they’re already familiar with. COVID has forced a lot of major changes, and we can seamlessly make these digital transformations happen because we already had made connections and learned Lean Six Sigma.

“It’s an example of this program working.”

Gregory joined UC Santa Barbara as manager of the Collaborate Lab for the College of Letters and Science, then joined Hall and Szuwalski on the Process Innovation

team.

Since the shift to remote work at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Gregory has worked with the Office of the Registrar to improve the student petition process.

The team connected employees from various administrative departments through testing before training to familiarize them with the software. LSIT Process Innovation team members also hosted open forums and surveyed departments to discover their top priorities.

“We can’t do some of the things we were doing in person, but we can discuss over Zoom and continue to build those communities, bring them together and see what the best practice could be,” Gregory said. “We can bridge gaps and see people learning to come to us for process improvements on campus. We’re starting to see the potential of where people could connect.”

Overall, Hall said, it’s about positively impacting staff, faculty, and students, and empowering departments to champion improvement from within.

“The little things matter. If it works for at least one person, it’s totally worth it,” she said. “If process owners are confident with the outcome and that outcome improves their work, then we’ve succeeded. Through knowledge, passion, and kindness, we want to create collaborative process improvement successes that could lead to best practices.”

The LSIT Process Innovation program also resonates with others. Since the team presented at the Network for Change and Continuous Innovation (NCCI) Annual Conference in July, two academic institutions — including Princeton University — have requested presentations.

“It was an honor to even be asked to present, especially for a team that’s only a year and a half old,” Szuwalski said.

More information about the LSIT Process Innovation team, how campus departments have benefitted from its guidance, and how to request a process improvement project may be found at process.lsit.ucsb.edu.

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.