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Basic Principles of Service Excellence

The Tseng College is committed to developing and offering programs of academic excellence and distinction. The Tseng College is also committed to developing and offering programs that result in an exceptionally high level of student achievement.

We expect students to achieve the full range of learning goals that are the foundation of each program and each course – learning goals that focus on creating conceptually versatile and sophisticated practitioners with the knowledge base and professional abilities needed for success and leadership in the field in question in the context of the global economy in the decades ahead. But, regardless of the excellence of any program, student achievement also relies heavily on the quality, scope, and responsiveness of all of the support services provided by the Tseng College team.

Starting from first contact (be that virtual, in print, or in person), a student must have accurate and timely information as well as the consistent support and guidance needed to enter the program and then stay in it through successful completion and graduation. Support services are the essential identity of the College and California State University, Northridge (CSUN).

We understand that whoever represents the Tseng College and CSUN in any direct or indirect interaction with a student shapes that student's impression of the College and the University and impacts the student's feeling of being welcomed and supported throughout their educational experience with CSUN and the Tseng College. With this in mind, the Tseng College strives for extraordinary levels of support services that help to ensure both student and Tseng College success.

The Constituencies to Which We Provide Service

Program Participants: Participants in most of the programs offered by the Tseng College do not consider themselves to be students in the traditional sense. Most of them are working adults who see their professional role and/or their community role as their primary identity. This is an essential understanding that must inform our decisions about the services and processes we create, the way we offer such services, and how we interact with our prospective and ongoing program participants. By and large, they do not expect to be treated like students. They are midcareer adults (or international students who have invested a lot and come a long way for an educational experience with CSUN) and they expect the same level of service they get in other aspects of their lives – from Amazon, Nordstrom, excellent hotels, and the like. The Tseng College is positioning CSUN to be a significant force in advanced professional and international education on a world stage and that requires world-class support services. Those who take our programs should feel that they have received responsive, caring, and exceptional service at every turn. This not only gives the Tseng College a strong service reputation and a competitive advantage, it also often makes a real difference in whether

or not someone juggling work and family obligations persists to the successful conclusion of a program or drops out in frustration because we make policies and processes that are difficult to navigate.

External Clients and Partners: In addition to individual program participants, the Tseng College has organizational and institutional clients and/or partners in the public and private sectors – regional, national, and international. These external clients direct participants to our programs, bring our programs to participants, help us expand our market reach, and/or work with us to create programs. In all cases, these external clients and partners are key to the success of the Tseng College and must, in that light, receive exceptional service. All of the service principles that apply to our work with individual participants also apply to our work with external clients and partners. In addition to that, external clients and partners require ongoing cultivation and stewardship to ensure they remain our clients and partners for the long term.

University Partners: The Tseng College also has a variety of working partnerships with University departments, colleges, and service units. We also have essential individual working relationships with faculty and University colleagues. The Tseng College must at every turn be a model of professionalism and service excellence when we work with University partners. The Tseng College provides a wide range of support services for each program and must be always recognized as exemplary in providing those services. This provision of exceptional services in support of programs is one of the Tseng College's definitive roles within CSUN – we must have the knowledge, skills, and abilities required in each service area to allow the University to develop and offer self-support programs successfully for an increasing range of markets.

Internal College Clients: Those in any support role in the Tseng College must also be committed to providing prompt and responsive service to their colleagues within the Tseng College. We are responsive and agile only to the extent to which each of us can count on our Tseng colleagues to respond to our service needs with the same speed and care as we would to our most important external clients. We understand that we are all working to serve our program participants, University partners, and external clients and if any one of us is asking a Tseng colleague for service, support, or guidance, it is prompted by the needs of a participant, partner, or client. Our service excellence to external and University participants, partners, and clients, in the final analysis, depends on the excellence of our services and support to Tseng College colleagues.

We Always Have More to Gain when Service is Excellent and More to Lose When Service Falts Than Our Clients Do: While excellence in support services makes an important positive difference in the educational experience of those we serve, building a reputation for service excellence gives us an enduring competitive advantage that extends well beyond any individual participant or client. Similarly, while any faltering in our support services and our care for those we serve may adversely impact their educational experience, it will have a bigger and longer lasting impact on the reputation of the Tseng College. Often above and beyond our marketing efforts, a major source of our enrollments is “word of mouth” (the endorsement and recommendations from fields and/or colleagues). The positive (or negative) regard that prompts others to recommend

our programs to colleagues is based as much on an individual's experience with the quality and responsiveness of our support services as with the program, itself, and its quality. Similarly, our reputation and credibility within the University is enhanced or diminished by the level of excellence we are able to achieve in support services.

Keep the Client in Sharp Focus: Whenever the Tseng College makes a change in processes or practices, we must do so with a focus on the needs of those we serve. We must assess each service choice we make in terms of whether or not it adds value for those we serve internally and externally, i.e. makes processes simpler, clearer, more transparent and sensible.

Policy, Form and Process Minimalists: Striving to be minimalists in all aspects of our processes and procedures contributes to our ability to be agile and to offer clients simple and easy services on all fronts. We should have no form we don't absolutely need, we should have no line on any necessary form that is not essential, we should make each user interface as simple and sensible as possible, we should not have any step or process that is not essential, and we should look for any approach possible to make our work smooth and simple and our clients' experience the same.

Doing Way More with Less – Simple and Scalable Support Service Strategies: As we grow, the Tseng College will continue to do much more with much less. We will continue to work hard to streamline processes, make it possible to enter any piece of information only once and then to use it widely, do as much as we can with online processes, avoid duplication of records and effort, make sound decisions about centralization of effort, and more. We also need to develop support services that provide high level of service but are scalable so we are innovative and sensible in determining how to provide services that can be applied to a wide range of programs with equal ease and success. We need to ensure our administrative process consumes as little College resources as possible so we can invest in new programs, focus on direct and engaged services to participants and clients, and build new revenue reserves for future investments. We need to keep it very smart and very simple and very effective.

Personal Service Via a Person: The Tseng College is committed to the idea that each program should have a single point of contact for each program and/or major organizational client. This approach allows us to channel the full service capabilities of the College and the University to the participant/client/partner through a single individual with whom those we serve can have a simple and direct communication. It makes the experience of navigating the University's processes simpler, more personal, and more caring. With this approach, we must recognize that it is the job of those who play this point of contact role to advocate for those we serve and to get from College colleagues and University units the services and support needed. Those providing services must respect this role and be responsive by providing services that allow us all to provide the kind of support services most valued and needed by those we serve.

Ensuring That Systems and Services Do Not Fail – Ours or Anyone Else's: It is essential that we in the Tseng College develop approaches to interacting with University systems and service units that prevent those systems and services from failing to the

extent possible. That is, in many cases, we cannot count on University systems to automatically and reliably deal with the needs of self-support programs and clients since those needs are often atypical. In that light, we have to develop approaches that assume that Tseng College service leads and liaisons in different areas will be required to take a proactive role shepherding various transactions through the University system in question and ensuring the success of the systems and services in question.

Innovation is Essential and Continuous: Innovation is not limited to program development. Innovation in support services is equally important to the success of the Tseng College. The service professionals in the College must be committed to regularly looking for innovative approaches to streamlining and improving our approach to services. This requires a high level of professional skills and abilities in each service professional and the ability to work regularly across unit lines to engage the cross unit talents in the College to find innovative approaches to service and process improvement. Multiple perspectives and a wider range of knowledge and skills brought together lead to more regular and more enlightened innovation.

Identifying the Need for More Systemic Change: At times, improving Tseng College services requires changes in policies or practices at the University or CSU level. The first step in approaching such changes is to identify specifically a policy or process that is regularly the source of service complications and service faults for the Tseng College.

Once a particular problematic policy or process is identified, the service unit lead should discuss options with the dean who will then lead any initiative to advocate for needed policy and process changes at the University or CSU level.

Keep the Front-Line Clear: Those who work directly as the point of contact for those we serve are able to handle a greater number of programs (which improves the cost effectiveness of our support services and staffing) if those providing support services develop policies and procedures that facilitate the work. These policies and procedures must first avoid pushing administrative work toward those front-line roles and secondly provide a regular flow of real time information and rapid problem solving that allows those on the front-line to spend the minimum amount of time possible dealing with cumbersome administrative processes or wrestling with systems to get a problem resolved or a service provided. As new policies and processes are considered, key goals are keeping the front-line as free as possible from administrative duties and as well supported as possible with real-time easily accessed information to enable rapid problem solving and service excellence.

Keeping the Core of Support Services Focused, Coordinated and Appreciated: To ensure a seamless approach to developing and implementing support services that are innovative, effective, simple and scalable, the core support services staff will have a collaborative senior leadership team composed of the director of the financial group; the director of the applications, admissions and registration group; the director of student support services and administration; and the associate dean. All support service developments and refinements will be focused on service to the client and will be built on an in-depth understanding of how each support service impacts the work of program

directors/managers/coordinators so that each choice we make is a plus for the College overall and an enhancement to our efficiency and effectiveness. At the same time, it is essential that program directors/managers/coordinators learn to use all of the real time information systems available as we move forward so that the core support services professionals can focus on providing those core services and not looking up information that is available more easily online. Finally, in most areas we have forefront support services among CSU extended learning units and we are adding to and improving those regularly. We in The Tseng College recognize and appreciate the value of support services and must be committed to treating all those who provide them with the respect due valued professional colleagues essential to our overall success.

Respect and Engage the Talent and Expertise of Others: We have considerable expertise in the Tseng College – technical expertise of different sorts, expertise on key University processes and systems, expertise in particular areas of support services (international students, student accounts, etc.), and the like. We are made considerably stronger, more innovative, and more responsive and agile if we are able to draw those areas of expertise together to solve problems, refine policies and processes, or find innovative approaches to supporting new programs and new client groups. Service unit leads are empowered to convene (or engage virtually) cross-unit groups to explore options and solve problems as necessary.

Finding the Roots of Service Excellence in Communication: In large part, service excellence is rooted in strong and regular communication. First, we need to share (regularly and effectively – in brief) information about the service achievements and initiatives in each area so that we all know what new capabilities we collectively have and can, in turn, use those new capabilities across unit lines to streamline and expand services. Secondly, we need to let our clients, our University partners and our Tseng colleagues know that we have indeed solved a problem they identified and/or we have looked into and addressed a concern about services they raised. We must close the communication loops to ensure those we serve not only receive excellent services but know that they have received them – that we have been responsive, innovative, and beyond one’s own work group and finding out the issues and perspectives impacting the actions of others is essential to developing a complete understanding of problems/issues and developing options for a solution that takes all aspects of the challenge into consideration.

All Hands on Deck – Keeping the College Agile and Responsive: The Tseng College must always be agile and responsive in ways that are rare for a large University. Senior staff members are expected to look for ways to streamline practices with a focus on service excellence and ease (for internal and external clients). Further, senior professionals are expected to always be ready to pitch in and work on a new promising College initiative that moves ahead suddenly or changes direction midstream in response to client needs. Senior professionals in the College must understand that they have both a stake and a role in each program and service in the College and in their evolution and refinement over time.

Building Capacity: Each senior professional in the Tseng College is expected to regularly consider the differences between what we do today and what we as a College aspire to do in the years ahead in light of our strategic vision and plans. Each is expected to work to build the College's core capacities which will be essential to do the work envisioned in the years ahead. This may include systematic review and restructuring of a work group or function to provide a better and more targeted level of support to a changing portfolio of programs, delivery modes, and markets. It might also include redefining positions that are vacant to focus on new skills and abilities needed and providing focused professional development for ongoing staff. It may also include changing policies and procedures, working within the University and the CSU to expand options and move barriers, and the like. Capacity building and contributing to strengthening the College for today and tomorrow are a part of each senior staff member's role. The Tseng College is not a static organization and its success depends on its ability to move forward with strength and imagination, which requires senior professionals committed to a proactive and creative approach to support service leadership.