



Editor's note: The Efficient Elite

by Megan Schmidt



Can colleges and universities—idyllic sanctuaries of learning, discovery and innovation—be efficient? In recent years, higher education has encountered increasing pressure to operate more like a business—leaner, more accountable and more responsive to the needs of its customers. Skyrocketing tuition, declining public funding, low graduation rates and underprepared graduates are just a few issues weighing on the institution.¹

For transformational change to occur, higher education must do what countless other organizations and industries have done and implement quality approaches to manage and improve operations. Lean Six Sigma (LSS), the focus of this month's feature article, is recognized as a rigorous and data driven approach to maximize process performance, save money and improve customer satisfaction. Although LSS has been widely implemented in almost every industry—from automotive to healthcare—education hasn't embraced the approach with open arms.

In this month's feature article, "The Business Case for Lean Six Sigma in Education," Norma Simmons, the ASQ Education Division Secretary, explains how LSS can help education organizations gain a competitive advantage and survive in a time of declining public support. Citing specific examples, Simmons also discusses the residual effect of implementing a LSS

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program—the improvement of the people side of the organization through team building, communication and cross-functional collaboration.

Since the heart of LSS is process management, in this issue you'll also find an open-access excerpt from the ASQ Quality Press book *Process Management in Education: How to Design, Measure, Deploy and Improve Organizational Processes*.

Then, we'll look at a recent study published in the *Journal for Quality and Participation* that found involving engineering students in Six Sigma projects had a positive effect on retention and engagement levels. Finally, in "Vision for a 22nd Century Learning Environment," *ASQ Education Brief* Associate Editor Marianne Di Pierro explores how educators are employing innovative technologies in their respective disciplines and creating holistic learning environments that reflect the social and academic integration necessary for student success.

Even higher education—one of the oldest, most established and important institutions is not immune to the forces emerging from an increasingly consumer and technology driven world. Regardless of what changes and how it changes, it'll be exciting to watch it unfold.

Reference

1. Josh Heck, "Higher Education Facing 'Unprecedented' Pressures, Friends University Chief Says," *Wichita Business Journal*, Jan. 3, 2013, www.bizjournals.com/wichita/print-edition/2013/02/01/higher-education-facing.html?page=all.