Traveling “LEAN”: A Streamlined Guide to Business Process Streamlining at UCR

- A business process is a series of activities designed to provide a specific service or product to a specific customer or client (or group thereof).

- A “Lean”, or streamlined, business process is one that delivers all of the value that its customers or clients desire, while eliminating all non-essential steps. Such a process is considered to “flow” without interruption, like a stream of water.

- The value in a process (what is desired; by when; and in what form) is determined by its customers, and it may vary from one process to another, or from one customer to another.

- The steps in a business process are the responsibility of those who perform it. Each step in a process may or may not provide value from the viewpoint of its intended client(s). Steps that do provide value are known as “value-added” steps.

- Some steps in a business process may not be “value-added” from the perspective of its customers/clients, but are essential in order to comply with requirements of parties external to the process, e.g. government regulators or granting agencies.

- A step in a business process that does not provide value to its customer, and is not essential for compliance purposes, is considered to contain waste. There are various forms of waste, involving expenditures of time, money, expertise, and materials.

- A “process map” is a graphic method of describing the steps in a business process. A “Value Stream Map” (VSM) is a specific form of map that uses “metrics” to measure the expenditures of time, money, personnel, and materials that are included in each step, and symbols to portray the route that a process takes.

- The goal of a VSM is to point out the steps in a process that contain the most waste. This tool allows for a process to be transformed from its “current state” to a streamlined “future state” in which customer value and “flow” are maximized, while waste is eliminated.

- At UCR, many business processes that impact large numbers of customers are being analyzed - using the “Lean” principles of value, waste, and flow - by groups known as “Lean Thinkers” who have been trained in “process mapping”. The ultimate goal: “perfect” processes that respond to client demand (“Pull”). For now: more “Lean Thinkers” needed!