#1. Accomplishments and the current status:

The General Education Action Project made great strides this past year, including deciding on Educational Testing Service’s MAPP test (Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress) as our main method of measuring general education learning outcomes among our students. The committee chose this test over the previous test that we considered (the CLA) because the MAPP has better benchmarking data available; 75 community colleges nationwide use this test (with the CLA, only 8 community colleges were on the list). The test measures skill areas of critical thinking, reading, writing and math in three subject area contexts (humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences). Lastly, MAPP offers an abbreviated version of the test, which takes only 40 minutes; we can also add up to 50 of our own questions if we like. The test is in a multiple choice format, which, coupled with the time allotted for the test, will probably be more appealing to our students than the CLA, which was time-consuming (90 minutes).

We administered the MAPP test for the first time toward the end of the Spring 2008 semester, aiming to capture a representative group of sophomores (we defined our testing group as having at least 50 hours of credit); 61 students in AA, AS, & AAS programs completed the test. We then administered the test to a second pilot group during Freshman Orientation at the beginning of the Fall 2008 semester; 95 students completed the test. The initial data show that our students have higher scores as sophomores than as entering freshmen in the four skill areas tested during their time at Kaskaskia College, although it is important to note that one data set is not conclusive. At this point, the Assessment Coordinator has examined these first two data sets and is preparing a summary of the findings for the Action Project committee. Funding has been allocated for Fiscal Year 2009 – both for fall and spring testing and incentives for participation – and the test is being incorporated into New Student Orientation. Calculators were purchased for standardization of the testing environment.

#2. Describe how the institution involved people in work on this Action Project.

This action project is part of the College’s Five-Year Institutional Plan (along with the other AQIP projects), a plan that is reviewed and updated every fall semester. New members were added to the committee at the beginning of the Fall 2007 (FY 2008) semester, including one of the student advisers from Student Services, the director of online learning, and the program director for radiologic technology (whose department won the assessment award in Fiscal Year 2007). In addition, the new assessment coordinator attended most of the meetings and offered ample support and guidance throughout the process; even more so, she took over proctoring the first round of testing when we had to extend the testing dates. The assessment coordinator, along with a new sponsor (as a result of administrative staff turnover), helped tremendously to motivate the committee and get the testing underway. Faculty in the Success Center were also instrumental in administering the tests.

#3. Describe your planned next steps for this Action Project.

We need to reconsider our recruiting methods for sophomores; despite offering financial incentives and sending invitations to three times the number of students we needed, not enough students showed up for the spring testing during the allotted testing dates, so we had to extend the deadline and ask faculty to send us students with at least 50 hours of credit.
In the fall semester, we need to reconsider the time of the day that testing takes place; by the time students sat down to take the MAPP, it was the end of a long day of orientation, and there is some indication that some students were rushing through the test.

Our most important step will be to look at the data we’ve gathered and decide how to share it with the rest of the college, the faculty in particular. We need to decide what it is showing us about what students learn and where we can make improvements in what we teach them, while making sure not to draw conclusions not supported by the data. An additional year of data will help us to ensure that we draw realistic conclusions.

#4. Describe any "effective practice(s)" that resulted from your work on this Action Project.

We are being very careful to select our cohorts based on statistical standards and the recommendations of the MAPP administration guide. In doing so, we have identified misperceptions on the numbers of students in degree programs. We have also involved the assessment coordinator to compile the results of the MAPP testing so the energies of the committee members can be better spent deciding what actions to take based on the data rather than in interpreting it.

#5. What challenges, if any, are you still facing in regards to this Action Project?

Our first challenge is in getting students to give the test their best effort. We offered small incentives for all participants and three financial awards for the highest scores for the pilot round of testing but had second thoughts following the test; for example, we are concerned that those students who “know” they won’t score that high will not put forth their best effort. Also simply getting enough students (and a diverse representation of students) to show up to take the test will continue to be challenging. The committee will have to examine whether we should offer additional prizes (door prizes, for example) or some other incentives.

Our other challenge will be in closing the loop: how do we decide what changes need to be made, which departments or faculty need to make changes based upon the data we have gathered, and how to determine whether the changes were effective in improvements. Finally, how do we get faculty buy-in so that they make these changes?

#6. Would you like to discuss the possibility of AQIP providing you help to stimulate progress on this action project?

At this point, no assistance from AQIP is requested; we are moving forward according to our established timetable and can document progress being made as we continue to improve our processes to fully accomplish our stated goals for this project.