Action Project

Institution: Kaskaskia College
Submitted: 2006-05-10
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Timeline:
Planned project kickoff date: 08-31-2006
Target completion date: 08-31-2009
Actual completion date: --

A. Give this Action Project a short title in 10 words or fewer:
General Education Core Assessment

B. Describe this Action Project's goal in 100 words or fewer:
This AQIP project will create and implement general education core curriculum standards and assessment of student learning. Necessary training will be provided as needed and deemed appropriate by the project committee to all faculty and involved staff. At the end of this project, full and part-time faculty will employ the core curriculum standards and its assessment in appropriate courses and equally as importantly will utilize the assessment results to enhance student learning as indicated by the assessment. A consistent and appropriate method of documenting assessment results and how these results have been used to enhance student learning shall be kept along with appropriate benchmarking and dashboards.

C. Identify the single AQIP Category which the Action Project will most affect or impact:
Primary Category: Helping Students Learn

D. Describe briefly your institution's reasons for taking on this Action Project now -- why the project and its goals are high among your current priorities:
• This project is in response to feedback from the HLC, the Illinois Lincoln Foundation for Performance Excellence, and the College's Conversation Day. Because of its function as a foundational block in learning enhancement and because of the number of learners it will affect, it is a high priority project. The project will have the additional benefit of offering deeper education of assessment techniques for all faculty and should benefit learning beyond the general education core.

E. List the organizational areas - -institutional departments, programs, divisions, or units -- most affected by or involved in this Action Project:
All Full and part-time faculty, Institutional Research Department, College Assessment Team, Student Success Center, Teaching and Learning Excellence Center

F. Name and describe briefly the key organizational process(es) that you expect this Action Project to change or improve:
• Curriculum Design • Assessment and Teaching Redesign • Instruction • Tutoring • Student Placement
G. Explain the rationale for the length of time planned for this Action Project (from kickoff to target completion):

Year 1- determine core standards, rubric, methodology and pilot. This will lay the foundation for the project and allow the project to be tested and retooled before it is fully implemented Year 2-revise and implement campus wide with full-time faculty and selected part-time faculty. Full-time faculty and some part-time faculty will become familiar with the process and can offer suggestions for improvement and act as mentors for year3 Year 3- Revise, Implement campus wide with all full and part-time faculty The project requires extensive dialoguing and buy-in in order to be successful. The three year time period allows this to occur and for the changes that will be made to curriculum to be designed and implemented in well-thought out and smooth manner.

H. Describe how you plan to monitor how successfully your efforts on this Action Project are progressing:


I. Describe the overall "outcome" measures or indicators that will tell you whether this Action Project has been a success or failure in achieving its goals:

Core Curriculum Standards are defined and infused into appropriate general education courses. Core standards are regularly measured utilizing a variety of appropriate assessment tools and the results of this assessment is documented. Assessment results are utilized in revising teaching which results in improvements in student learning. Dashboards reflect improvements in student learning in core curriculum standards based upon changes made to curriculum as a result of assessment.

J. Other information (e.g., publicity, sponsor or champion, etc.):

Sponsors: Kellie Henegar, Dean of Arts and Sciences

K. Project Leader and contact person:

Contact Name: Sue Hardebeck, Professor of English
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Annual Update: 2008-09-11

A. Describe the past year's accomplishments and the current status of this Action Project.

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 community college 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.

Review (09-30-08):
Kaskaskia College is 25 months into a 36-month-long project to create and implement general education core curriculum standards and an assessment process for these standards. The goals the team set for itself back in 2006 were very substantial and, as alluded to in the last update, even daunting. The magnitude of the project is proportional to its importance, and the progress made last year suggests that Kaskaskia College has one of the fundamental assets of a high performing organization, and that is “people.” The work put into this project thus far and the resiliency the team has exhibited despite the loss of key team members speaks to the commitment and quality of the people involved. The team has switched to the MAPP test (from the CLA) as its measure of core learning outcomes for legitimate and practical reasons, and an initial pilot of the test was done in 2008 with representative samples of freshmen and sophomores. The incorporation of the test into New Student Orientation and inclusion of the costs of test administration in the budget for 2009 reflect the steady progress being made on this project. A very important aspect of this project—the interpretation and use of the data by instructors in the classroom—appears to be awaiting the achievement of reliable data sets. While the team continues work on addressing student motivation and achieving a valid sample of test results, it may consider engaging the question of what the results can tell Kaskaskia College vis-avis student attainment of the general education standards. The steps between sharing test results from fairly general tests like the MAPP and making changes in specific courses or areas of the curriculum can be fraught with conflicting views and emotion on any campus. This reviewer is, therefore, urging the team to thoroughly explore the different scenarios for sharing the data across campus and consider doing a focus group with faculty members to learn more about how they interpret the results and how they link the results to classroom practice.

B. 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 an assessment award in Fiscal Year 2007). In addition, the new assessment coordinator attended most of the meetings and offered
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.

**Review (09-30-08):**
The team clearly has involved a very wide array of people, perspectives, and institutional units into its work. Incorporating this project into the institution’s five-year plan is an excellent way to maintain momentum, support, and focus on its completion.

C. 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.

**Review (09-30-08):**
The challenge of motivating students to do their best when voluntarily taking a test is one that is exceedingly well known by anyone involved in a similar effort. Much has been written on the topic, and this reviewer suggests asking the assessment coordinator to query her professional colleagues and the literature on techniques that do and do not work. Relatively few institutions are successful in getting a valid data set through volunteerism and incentives, but many have devised creative ways of associating the taking of the test with another activity. Interesting research has been done on the value of simply querying students about their motivation and efforts before and after the test. Regardless of the steps the College takes to maximize the seriousness with which students take the test, great care should be taken to anticipate how any special measures to increase or ensure participation could be interpreted later on by the people asked to utilize the results to drive improvements. Being able to go to the faculty with reliable data is clearly a goal of the team.

D. 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.

**Review (09-30-08):**
The team is wise to rely on standards of practice for sampling and to follow the guidelines
offered by the Educational Testing Service. As acknowledged in the update, the team’s energies are better invested in thinking about how the data will be received, interpreted, and used by instructors.

E. 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?

Review (09-30-08):
The team has done a good job of identifying its most pressing challenges. The potential pitfalls in employing incentives for testing are touched on above. The greater challenge of deploying the data to ‘close the loop’ is justifiably at the forefront of the team’s thinking. This reviewer suggests that the team consider asking instructors to suggest how they might use or interpret the data instead of the team taking on the responsibility of deciding what changes need to be made. It may be that a maturing phase of the project will entail sharing responsibility for its success. A time-tested way of achieving buy-in is to bring people into the decision-making process along the way.

F. If you would like to discuss the possibility of AQIP providing you help to stimulate progress on this action project, explain your need(s) here and tell us who to contact and when?

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.